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# CHRISTIAN ORIENT

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## SPIRITUALITY

**EAST SYRIAN PERSPECTIVES ON THE FULLNESS  
OF PRIESTHOOD**

Dr. Lonappan Arangassery, MST

**SAINT ALPHONSA: A FAITHFUL BRIDE OF CHRIST**

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**THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY**

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## Editorial

“East Syrian Perspectives on the Fullness of Priesthood” by Dr. Lonappan Arangassery, highlights the goal envisaged by Pope Benedict XVI while announcing the year for priests, namely an effective witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in today’s world by an interior renewal of priests. After analyzing the New Testament concept of priesthood, the author dwells at length on the meaning of the fullness of priesthood. According to the Church documents as well as the biblical and liturgical tradition the *fullness of priesthood* is understood more in terms of close imitation of Christ, who offered his life on the cross for the salvation of all. The priest represents Christ sacramentally. This sacramental identification with the Eternal High Priest inserts the priest into the Trinitarian mystery and equips him to serve the People of God in Christ’s name. The fact that in the East Syrian tradition reference to the fullness of priesthood is made in the *Syamida* (Laying on of hand) prayer only over the priest and not over the bishop is something specific.

Msgr. Paul Pallath, one closely associated with the whole process of the canonization of St. Alphonsa, fathoms the depth of the spirituality of this first woman-saint of India in his article, “Saint Alphonsa: a Faithful Bride of Christ”. Remaining faithful to her heavenly Bridegroom, Alphonsa whose life was entirely

centred on Christ, preserved the baptismal grace until her death.

Dr. Sebastian Chalakkal, in his article “The Resurrection of Jesus in Contemporary Christology” analyzes different opinions among the scholars about the resurrection and concludes that the fact of resurrection is not to be seen in isolation apart from other Christological mysteries or outside of the context of the whole economy of salvation. The resurrection of Jesus according to him is a mystery of faith to be celebrated, meditated on and lived rather than to be exhausted. The risen Lord encountered in the Eucharistic celebration should enable the Christian to recognize Him in the poor in the world outside.

Fr. Alex Pandarakappil examines why and how Christians consider history as the locus of Revelation and the Sacred Scripture as inspired by God in his article, “Theology of Revelation and Experience of the Living Word”. In his words, by communicating what God has done in history the Holy Scripture tells us what He is. In the contemplative reading of the Scripture, of which the Liturgy of the Word is the summit, the Holy Spirit resonates the incarnated Verb. The Holy Scripture thus nourishes the faith of the ecclesial community but it is always the community that helps the Scripture to be acknowledged as the Word of God.

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# East Syrian Perspectives on the Fullness of Priesthood

Dr. Lonappan Arangassery MST, D.Sc.E.O.<sup>1</sup>

The “Year for Priests” inaugurated by the Holy Father on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2009, the solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, is intended, on the one hand, for commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> death (“*dies Natalis*”) anniversary of John Mary Vianney (+1859), the heavenly patron of all parish priests; and on the other hand it is intended for deepening the “commitment of all priests to interior renewal for the sake of a more forceful and incisive witness to the Gospel in today’s world.”<sup>2</sup> The year for priests, concluding on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart in 2010, is a great and graced occasion to reflect on the nature of the priesthood of Christ and the shape of priesthood being lived by the individual Christians thanks to their baptismal call and by those who participate in the ministerial priesthood. The year is also meant to help all of us revisit what the faith tells us that a priest is and to encourage ordained priests in their lives of service and dedication. In the present article we intend to share our reflections on the notion of the “fullness of priesthood”<sup>3</sup> which is often exaggerated and consequently misinterpreted and misunderstood. We make this study from biblical,

historical, liturgical and East Syrian perspective.

## 1. Priesthood of Christ

Jesus is non-clerical and on certain occasions even anti-clerical and he did not hesitate to criticise strongly the cultic practices of the Israelites (Mt 9:13). He associated himself with those who were “impure” before the cultic law (Mt 9:10). The picture of the priest and Levite in the parable of Good Samaritan is far from being the ideal. Jesus never called himself or his disciples, priests. The only priesthood which Jesus and his immediate followers apparently recognised was the ministry of Jewish temple priests. After healing the leper, he was asked by Jesus to present himself before the priests and offer sacrifices as required by the Law of Moses (Mt 8:4).

St Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim 2:5) speaks of Christ as the one mediator between God and man. The book of Revelation (1:13) refers to a vision of Jesus with priestly vestments. The death of Christ is described as sacrifice using typological symbols from the OT such as paschal lamb (1 Cor 5:7; Jn 1:29; 19:36; Rev 5:9), the redeeming blood

<sup>1</sup> Readers’ comments and observations on the article may be sent to: lonappan55@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Clergy for the year for Priests, Vatican City, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Cf Vatican II, Constitution *Lumen gentium* 28; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 7; Decree *Christus Dominus* 28; Decree *Ad gentes* 19; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* 17.



of the covenant (Mk 14:24; Rom 3:25; Eph 1:7) or by means of the theological formula of expiation, the “for you” in Mk 10:45; Lk 22:19; Jn 10:11-15. The post-Pauline letter to Hebrews gives a systematic and sustained exposition of the priesthood of Jesus. It describes the saving action of Christ in terms of the OT priesthood and sacrifice. In virtue of his solidarity with men except in sin (Heb 2:17; 4:15; 7:26) and of his divine sonship (Heb 1:2f), Jesus is constituted a priest for ever in the power of the Holy Spirit through an oath sworn by God (Heb 5:5; 7:20ff; 7:16).

## 2. Priesthood in the NT

In the NT, nowhere it is spoken explicitly of a ministerial priesthood, that is, of a special body of professional priests distinct from the other members of the Church. The proper term for cultic priest-Hiereus-is never used for an individual Christian in the Church. In the NT the term *hiereus* (sacerdos/ cultic priest) is reserved for the members of Jewish and gentile priesthood (Mk 1:44; Lk 1:5). In other words, in the NT there are no *hiereus* or sacerdos except Christ, the high priest and the Christian community which is a priestly people. The Greek term *hiereus* means a priest, one who offers sacrifices and in general it is used with sacred rites. Metaphorically it is used to refer to Christians, because, purified by the blood of Christ and brought into close contact with God, they devote their life to him alone

and to Christ. In the apostolic Church was applied to the unique priesthood of Christ (Heb 3:1) as well as to the collective priesthood of the whole people of God or the Church (1 Pet 2:9). The term *hiereus* is used in the OT in the background of priesthood of the Levites.

According to the self-understanding of the first Christians, the Church is a “community of God”<sup>4</sup>, a “community of Christ”<sup>5</sup> and a “temple of the Holy Spirit”<sup>6</sup> and the leadership that originated spontaneously “from below” was recognised by the community as a “gift of the Lord” “from above” to His Church (community), the Body of Christ where dwells the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> The “apostles” or “apostolates” were in fact not restricted to the “twelve” which excluded Paul and others who joined the apostles in the building up of the first Christian communities. These others were known as prophets. Hence Eph 2:20 speaks of “apostles and prophets” as the foundation of the earliest Christian communities.<sup>8</sup> Even before the entry of Paul, there arose tensions between the Aramaic Christians (Hebrews) and Greek speaking Christians (Hellenists), when the former neglected the latter in providing material help. It was solved when the “apostles together with the whole Church” (Acts 6:2) assembled and appointed seven people for the care of the Greek speaking Christians.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I Thess 2:14; I Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; II Thess 1:4; Acts 20:8.

<sup>5</sup> Rom 16:16; I Thess 1:1.

<sup>6</sup> I Cor 3:16; 6:19.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Eph 4:8-11; I Tim 4:14; II Tim 1:6; E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, SCM Press, London (1984<sup>3</sup>), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 6:1-15.



In fact these ministers were spreading the gospel like the “apostles”, for we find that one among them Philip “the evangelist” (Acts 21:8) did everything that the apostles did. The Lukan interpretation of the seven as “deacons” is historically incorrect.<sup>10</sup> And these Greek speaking Jewish Christians who were persecuted by Sanhedrin fled to Samaria and further north to Syria and on their way founded and organised many Christian communities in Samaria (Acts 8:5, 12, 26-40) and other places on the Mediterranean, making Caesarea the centre. In fact, Saul (Paul) was initiated by this ecclesial community (Acts 22:12; 9:10-12; 9:17f) to which Ananias of Antioch belonged.<sup>11</sup> We find in the apostolic Church, therefore, a deep awareness of the ecclesial and collegial dimension of the ministries which are gifts of the Lord to his Church (Eph 4:8-11; I Tim 4:14; II Tim 1:6).

### 3. Priesthood in the Apostolic Church

In the apostolic Christian community we discover several grades of ministries co-existing such as preaching, healing, teaching, prophesying, helping the poor, exorcism, presiding over Agape etc. But priesthood is not one of them. When we analyse the references to the concept of leadership and ministries in the Acts of the Apostles, the letters of Paul and other New Testament writings, it appears that, the ministry in the early Church was based on God-given gifts or charisms.

The persons following the Lord and his teaching exercised various gifts as humble servants (Mt 20:26, 28) holding different titles in the community, such as preachers, prophets, teachers, healers, speakers in tongues, interpreters etc (1 Cor 12:28-30).<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.1: Apostles and Fellow Workers

The “twelve apostles” and their collaborators, the “other apostles” and the prophets (Acts 13:1-3) were conscious of their being sent by the Lord, dead and risen with whom they were associated in one way or other as was the case with Saul turned Paul. When the “apostles and the prophets” moved on, the responsibility of the community fell on natural and spontaneous local leaders who did not have any special name or title. In the Pauline Churches, the “fellow workers” (Rom 16:3; I Thess 3:2; II Cor 8:23) who are engaged “in the work of the Lord” (I Cor 15:58) and toil for the community and devote themselves to the saints, i.e. Christians (I Thess 1:1; I Cor 1:1; II Cor 1:1) are carefully chosen and tested (Phil 2:19-24). The Christians are asked to submit to these fellow workers and labourers some of whom are sometimes also local leaders (I Cor 16:16), for they share the apostolic authority and privilege (I Cor 9:6; 11f.; I Thess 5:12-14; I Cor 16:10-12) and they build on the foundation laid by the apostles (I Cor 3:10). The apostles and fellow workers are “co-workers with God” (I Cor 3:9).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. D.C. Smolarski, *Sacred Mysteries: Sacramental Principles and Liturgical practice*, New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press (1995), 127.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 7-9.



In his exhortation to the elders (1 Pet 5:1-4) apostle Peter clearly admits that he is their brother-presbyter or fellow-elder and his credentials are: that he is *a witness of the sufferings of Christ* and His resurrection (Acts 3:15) and that he is *a partaker of the glory* that was in some degree revealed at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1-3). Although Peter asks the younger to be subject to the elders and be humble, he values himself upon being an elder. He however, does not claim sovereignty over all other pastors and churches, rather he projects Christ as the chief Shepherd who would reward all the elders/pastors. All the apostles were elders, though every elder was not an apostle. It was the unique honour of Peter, and a few more, to be the witnesses of Christ's sufferings; but it is the privilege of all true Christians to be partakers of the glory that shall be revealed. The "twelve apostles" (Peter with the eleven) is the symbol of the 12 patriarchs and tribes of Israel. Perkins says that the Evangelist Matthew never separates the central figure Peter completely from the larger group of disciples, so that he is given proper correction and instruction.<sup>14</sup> L. Legrand says, "It is not so much Peter who works for God as God who leads Peter in his task."<sup>15</sup>

Peter speaks of the three-fold pastor's duty: *To feed the flock*, by preaching to them the sincere word of God, and ruling them according to such directions and discipline as the word of God prescribes and to *take the oversight thereof*. The elders are exhorted to do

the office of overseers (bishops) as the word signifies, by personal care and vigilance over all the flock committed to their charge. The pastors are to be *examples to the flock* and practise the holiness, self-denial, mortification, and all other Christian duties, which they preach and recommend to their people.

### 3.2. "Itinerant" and "Settled" Ministry

We could make a broad distinction of ministries in the apostolic and post apostolic period found in the New Testament. On the one side we find a "missionary", an "itinerant", an "apostolic" or "charismatic" ministry, although the latter term is misleading and on the other side we find a "local" or "settled" ministry. The former is represented by the apostles which also includes also men like Barnabas. The latter is represented by "overseers" (*Episkopoi*) or "elders" (*Presbyteroi*) and deacons (servants-*Diakono*i).

Paul speaks of "those who labour for the community" and "those who are over you" (1 Thess 5:12). St. Paul shows his concern for a worthy successor in Timothy and the basis for the succession is the "community of Faith". (Phil. 2:19-24). In Jerusalem, James, the brother of our Lord, was the head, but he was surrounded by a group of presbyters and assisted by them in the decision making.<sup>16</sup> We find presbyters mentioned in six places together with the apostles, although in connection with the apostolic council and historically, besides in Jerusalem, presbyterate

<sup>14</sup> Cf. P. Perkins, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church*, Edinburgh (2000), 72.

<sup>15</sup> L. Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible*, Et. R. R. Barr, Pune (1994), 96.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 11:30; 21:28; also 15:2.



was spread beyond especially in Asia Minor and in Crete.<sup>17</sup> Schillebeeckx affirms that at the close of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, "there was a Church order according to which a group of presbyters was responsible for the and pastoral care of the local communities (see Acts 14:23; 20:17; 20-30; I Peter 5:1; I Tim 3:1-7; 5:17-22; Titus 1: 5-11; James 5:14; II John 1:1; III John 1:1; also in the extra canonical literature: I Clement 44; Didache 15:1). The presbyters are also called '*episcopoi*' without any perceptible difference, among other reasons because they had the function of oversight (*episcopo*).<sup>18</sup>

The one chosen by the people to be an elder or overseer exercised priestly functions in the Church as well as the office of the presbyter or "overseer" (*Episkopoi*) namely the function of teaching, shepherding and governing. As we mentioned above, in the NT and in the early Church, *hierous* refers to Christ the High Priest and the baptised.<sup>19</sup> Thus the leadership structure that developed in the early Church seems to have come from two sources namely a Jewish leadership format of a council of elders (*Presbyteroi*) and Greek format of a single overseer (*Episkopos*) with several assistants known as servants (*diakonoi*).<sup>20</sup>

### 3.3. Priesthood in the Early Church

It is surprising to observe that, the ministry in the New Testament did not develop with a liturgical orientation or in view of the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy. Rather the emphasis was on the apostolic building up of the community through preaching, admonition and leadership.<sup>21</sup> This, however, does neither mean that the Eucharist was unrelated to ministry nor that anyone could preside over the Eucharist, which is "the tradition of the Lord" himself (I Cor 11:23) which the apostles were bound to celebrate whenever they gathered together. It was evident that the leader of the community presided over the Eucharistic gathering.<sup>22</sup> In I Clement, the president of the Eucharistic assembly is the episcopos-presbyter and therefore, the one who was competent to guide and lead the community was *ipso facto* competent to preside over the Eucharistic celebration.<sup>23</sup> The liturgical functions of the leaders of the community would be highlighted more clearly in the later centuries.

### 3.4. Priesthood in the Church of Didachè

The Didachè 15:1 exhorts to appoint (*Cheirotonysate*)<sup>24</sup> overseers (*Episkopoi*) and

<sup>17</sup> Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22f., 16:4; in Jerusalem Acts 11:30; 21:18; beyond: Acts 14:23; 20:17. Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 14-15.

<sup>18</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> See Letter to the Hebrews and 1 Pet 2:5, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Smolarski, *Sacred Mysteries*, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 30.

<sup>24</sup> Niederwimmer translates *Cheirotonysate* as "select". K. Niederwimmer, *The Didache: A Commentary*, L. M. Maloney, tr. from German original (1989), H. W. Attridge, ed., Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, (1998), 200.



'servants'/deacons *diakonoi* worthy of the Lord.<sup>25</sup> *Episkopoi* appears 4 times in NT and 13 times in LXX. In NT *Episkopoi* is used interchangeably.<sup>26</sup> *Diakonoi* occurs 30 times in Christian Scriptures but referring to "serving" ministry rather than deacon's ministry.<sup>27</sup> The Didachè speaks of two categories of ministers found in the New Testament, that is, the category of the teachers, apostles and prophets (11:3-11) and the category of the overseers (*episkopoi*)<sup>28</sup> and deacons (*diakonoi*)<sup>29</sup> (15:1). From the text and context, it is clear that the overseers and deacons were chosen (15:1) from among the Apostles-prophets-teachers to lead the community in a stable manner.<sup>30</sup> The prophets are considered to be the presidents of the cultic assembly also and it is confirmed by the name «high priest» given to them in Didachè 13:3.<sup>31</sup> In the Didachè 15:1 the overseers (*episkopoi*) are assisted by deacons (*diakonoi*), who are responsible for the overall spiritual and the material needs of the Christian

community. Since the Didachè does not expose the liturgical rites, we do not come across the term *hiereus* - the proper Greek term for priests in the OT and NT.

The Didachè seems to presuppose the priestly or liturgical role of the overseers, because without priests Eucharistic gatherings it speaks of, could not be materialised. The Didachè speaks of the choice and appointment of overseers and deacons immediately after the references to the Sunday celebrations that are naturally presided over by the overseers (*episkopoi*). Commenting on 15:1 of the Didachè, Schaff writes: "This chapter treats of the local or stated and permanent ministers of the gospel. It is separated from the chapters on the Apostles and prophets (XI-XIII), but connected with them by the Eucharistic sacrifice on the Lord's Day as the chief part of Christian worship."<sup>32</sup> The sacramentality of the overseer and the deacons need to be traced to the symbolic functions they

<sup>25</sup> "Appoint, then, for yourselves, bishops and deacons, worthy of the Lord, men gentle, and not money loving, and truthful and tested; for to you they likewise gratuitously serve the unpaid public service of the prophet-teachers". *Didachè*, 15:1; Et. A. Milavec, *The Didachè: Faith, Hope & Life of the Earliest Christian Communities*, 50-70 C.E., New York /Mahwah, N.J: The Newman press, (2003), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 20:17; 20:28; Tit 1:5-7; 7:1; I Tim 3:1; 5:17; I Clem 44; Cf. Milavec, *Didachè*, 584.

<sup>27</sup> Paul as deacon = I Cor 3:5; II Cor 3:6; 6:4; Eph 3:7; Phil 1:1; Col 1:23, 25. Jesus as deacon = Rom 13:4; 15:8; to refer to public preaching, healing and exorcism = Acts 6:8-10; 8:6-13. Cf. Milavec, *Didachè*, 586.

<sup>28</sup> Greek: *episkopos*, Latin: *episcopus*, Italian: *vescovo*; English: *bishop*, old French: *vesque*; French: *évêque*, Anglo-Saxon: *biscop*, *busceop*, German: *Bischof*.

<sup>29</sup> The term deacon (*diakonoi*) means minister or servant, and it is employed in this sense both in the LXX (Esther 2:2; 6:3) and New Testament (Mt 20:28; Rom 15:25; Eph 3:7 etc.).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Milavec, *Didachè*, 596-597.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. A. de Halleux, "Ministers in Didache", in J. A. Draper, ed., *The Didache in Modern Research*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, (1996), 300-320, here 302.

<sup>32</sup> P. Schaff, *The Oldest Church Manual called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, the Didache and kindred documents in original with translations and with illustrations and fac-similes of the Jerusalem manuscript*, Edinburgh: Clark, 1885; repr. London: Pendleburys, (2001), 211. Schaff also notes that the idea of Lord's Supper as through the hands of priests appeared only later in the third century at the time of Cyprian in connection with sacerdotal conception of ministry.



performed during liturgical celebrations rather than to their pastoral, administrative and temporal responsibilities. The criterion "worthy of the Lord" referred to in the Didachè may be seen in the context of liturgical symbolism, i.e. his worthiness to represent Christ, the priest and victim, the king and the Lord.<sup>33</sup>

In the Didachè, we do not find any indication that the 'overseers' exercised the 'fullness' of priesthood and the presbyters exercised a less perfect priesthood. However, the overseer being the presbyter responsible for a bigger or the whole community or a local Church, the exercise of certain priestly functions might have been reserved to them. The priesthood of Christ is exercised in the liturgical assembly by the ministers who are priests (a bishop or a presbyter) when they preside over sacramental celebrations. The *diakonia* of Christ is exercised primarily by the deacons and in lesser degree by other ministers when they assist at the liturgical celebrations and serve the Church in various ways. The Church being an institution in the world, the ministers (in the order of deacons) have also responsibilities and offices other than liturgical. These offices too have symbolisms which would be exposed by later documents and writers. This becomes even clearer when we go through the terms used in the *P'shitta* version of the Sacred Scripture and liturgical tradition of the Church of the East.

Justin the Martyr, another important witness to the Eucharist in the Early Church, compares the priesthood of Christ to the order of Melchizedek. For Justin, the Christ who is the High Priest, the king, God, the Lord and man, made his priesthood different from that of the OT by becoming the offerer and the victim.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the priesthood of the OT, it is the 'self offering' or *kenosis* that makes a presbyter or bishop a full *priest* in the NT and not the 'office' of the presbyteros or episcopos. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Ode in the Odes of Solomon there is a reference to the priesthood which echoes the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Apostle Peter (2:5) and the letter of Paul to Romans (15:15-16).<sup>35</sup>

#### 4. *Presbyteroi* and *Episcopoi* in the Syriac East

Instead of *hierens*, the NT speaks of *episkopoi*, *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi* as stable ministers as well as apostoloi who are not necessarily the twelve. The distinction made from the New Testament times between the overseers, elders or leaders and deacons prompted many to think of an Episcopal pattern of the ministry from the beginning of the Church.<sup>36</sup> In this context, it seems important to keep the distinct functions of the ministers in mind to understand the different terms used in the Syriac tradition. In *P'shitta*, the Syriac version of the Bible, the three words, namely «*arkona*», «*sa'ura*» and «*raya*» are used to refer to those responsible for the community. Peter

<sup>33</sup> In the East Syrian liturgy, the priest who chosen to represent Christ and to offer the sacrifice is fully conscious of his unworthiness to represent Christ as is expressed in the numerous prayers esp. in Kusâpâ prayers and "Pray Brothers" in the anaphora part.

<sup>34</sup> Ps 109; Heb 7-10; James 5:14; Justin, *Dialogue*, 34:2; 36:1; 42:1; 86:3; 118:2.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. B. Soro, "Priesthood in the Church of the East", *Syriac Dialogue* 6 (2004), 94-110, here 95.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 14:23; 20:17ff; Phil 1:1; 1 Pet 2:25.



uses «sa'ura» (ܫܐܘܪܐ) and «ra'ya» (ܪܝܐ) in his letter. The term ܡܠܝܚܐ means a ruler, commander, chief, captain. The term sa'ura or saora (ܫܐܘܪܐ) means 'an overseer' and the term raya (ܪܝܐ) means 'a shepherd' or 'a pastor' (1 Pet 2:25). It is significant to note that the term episkopos is found only once in the *Peshitta* (Acts 20:28) where Paul is addressing the Qashishe (presbyters/pastors) from Ephesus. In his letters to Timothy (1 Tim.3) and Titus (Titus 1), Paul refers to the functions and qualifications of the qashishe (Presbyters) and the deacons (ܡܫܡܫܢܐ) and not of episkopoi, for at time there was no distinction between a *presbyteros* and an *episcopos*. Thus, *Peshitta* differs from the Greek text.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the observation of de Halleux might be misleading for he says that, "in Syriac the lower ranks of ministerial priesthood, *presbyteros* and *diaconos*, were translated into Aramaic terms, *Qashisha* and *meshamshana*, perhaps as a sign of social differentiation".<sup>38</sup>

That the overseers or presbyters and deacons existed already in the apostolic Church and that they performed all functions including priestly functions in the community is clear from the letter of James and Acts of the Apostles. In James (5:14-16) people are asked to call the elders to lay hands on the sick and in the Acts of the Apostles (20:28) the elders

are asked to take care of the flock over which the Holy Spirit made them *episkopoi*. Hence in the early Church the elders were overseers and vice versa, for overseeing the flock was also the ministry of the elders. The observation of Schillebeeckx, in this context, is very pertinent.

"From Acts 20:17, compared with 20:28, and I Peter 5:5, compared with 5:2, it seems that *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi* are the same people. Titus 1:6ff. also suddenly mentions an *episcopos* in a context which is concerned with *presbyteroi*. Further more, in I Clement 44:1, as compared with 44:5, the *episcopos* is obviously a *presbyteros*. However, the so called 'monarchical episcopate' is not a biblical norm, although it is a legitimate form of Church order."<sup>39</sup>

The Church seems have made a distinction between the elders in the villages and elders in the cities. The permanent or stable ministers who exercised the office of the overseers in smaller communities began to be specified as presbyters (*Qashishe/ Presbyteroi*) and those stable ministers who were responsible for overseeing communities in big cities began to be specified as episkopoi.<sup>40</sup> As mentioned above, in the New Testament, the word for priest is *hierous* and it refers to Christ the priest and to the priesthood of the baptised.<sup>41</sup> It seems that when stable Christian

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Soro, "Priesthood", 96.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. A. de Halleux, "The Catholicity of the local Church in the Patriarchate of Antioch after Chalcedon", *The Jurist* 52 (1992), 109-129, here 110.

<sup>39</sup> Schillebeeckx, *Ministry*, 146, footnote 15 of ch.1 (5-37) 18.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Didascalia* refers to *episkopoi* as having power over the presbyters. *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, A. Vööbus, ed., Part I: chapters 1-10 (CSCO 401 (SS 175), Et: CSCO 402 (SS 176), 1979; Part II: chapters 11-26 (CSCO 407 (SS 179), Et: CSCO 408 (SS 180), 1979. Here *Didascalia*, III, 8, 24, CSCO 402, (SS.176), 41.



communities were formed the priesthood of Christ was exercised by the presbyters and episkopoi who were responsible for these stable communities. The primitive organization of the Churches, therefore, seems to have been modelled after the Jewish synagogue and the presbyters or bishops governed the Judaeo Christian communities and later this was also adopted by the Churches in the gentile world.

The Syriac *Didascalia* stipulates the bishop to be blameless, reproachable in nothing, one who is remote from all evil, a man not less than fifty years of age, removed from the conduct of the youth, lusts of the adversary, slander and blasphemy of false brethren.<sup>42</sup> He must be humble, merciful, peacemaker, vigilant, chaste and stable, and orderly. He shall not be violent, malicious, tyrannical, contentious, money-loving, and they shall not be addicted to wine and shall be a man of one wife.<sup>43</sup> In the *Didascalia* the *episkopos* is one responsible for all the affairs of the Church and head of the community and therefore he represents God the Father.<sup>44</sup> However, *Didascalia* does not speak of episcopoi as

bearers of a 'superior' priesthood. The terminologies used and the translations of various texts of the NT and in the P<sup>c</sup>shitta version of the bible points to the interchangeability of the terms *Qashishe* (*Presbyteroi*) and *Apiskope* (*Episcopoi*). The *Qashishe* were also obliged to 'oversee' and episcopacy (overseeing) was a special ministry of vigilance assigned to some among the Elders. We see a gradual development from the two-tier (*episcopoi/presbyteroi*) and *Diakonoi* model of the ministry projected by *Didachè* to a three tier model of the ministry of the ordained ministers in the Church in the *Didascalia*. It was done by placing presbyterate and episcopate on two levels. The contemporary Latin and Greek authors witness this.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.1. Priestly and Episcopal Ordination in the Church of the East

In the priestly ordination, the prayer before the 3<sup>rd</sup> *qānonā* asks God to perfect the hands of the candidates to administer the mysteries in purity. The prayer (b) asks for the grace to associate with the body of priests<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Letter to the Hebrews and 1 Pet 2:5,9.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Didascalia*, IV, CSCO 402, 43-44; cf also I Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; II Tim 2:22. Giving the example of young Solomon, Joash and Josiah, the *Didascalia*, however, approves of young people becoming bishops provided they are mature enough and if the congregation is small and all testify concerning him. Cf. *Didascalia*, IV, CSCO 402, 44; cf. also II Kgs 11:21; 21:1.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Didascalia*, IV, CSCO 402, 44-45; cf. also I Tim 3:2, 4, 6; Tit 1:7; II Tim. 2:22; Mt 5:5-9; Lk 14:11.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Didascalia*, XI, CSCO 408, 119-120; IX, CSCO 402, 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Episkopoi-Overseers, presbyteroi and diakoni* (Deacons). Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1995<sup>20</sup>), 532-534.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Ktāba d-takse kumraye* = *Liber ordinum pontificalium secundum usum sanctae Ecclesiae syrorum orientalium id est chaldaeorum*. (*Ktāba d-takse kumraye a(y)kē 'yada d-'idta qaddishia d-suryaye mdnhaye d-banum kaldaye*), Romae, (1957), 150-151; P. Yousif, *I Sacramenti nella liturgia caldea* [dispense], traduzione italiana del Pietro Yousif, PIO, Roma, (1983-1984), 97; I. Alenchery, *An Eastern Theology of Priesthood*, New Delhi, (1994), 14; Vosté, *Pontificale = Pontificale iuxta ritum Ecclesiae syrorum orientalium id est chaldaeorum*: Versio latina. Vosté ed., Civitate Vaticana, TPV, Pars I, (1937); Pars II-IV, (1938), 36; Badger, *Nestorians* = G.P. Badger, *The Nestorians and their Rituals*: with the narrative of a mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-1844, and of a late visit to those countries in 1850; also, researches into the present condition of the Syrian Jacobites, papal Syrians, and Chaldeans, and an inquiry into the religious tenets of the Yezedees, 2 vols, London, 1852, repr., 1987 333.



The prayer (a) before the 4<sup>th</sup> *qānonā* asks grace for them to minister at the altar and announce His Glory. The prayer (b) for one asks grace for him to perform priestly functions carefully and serve the mysteries spotlessly.<sup>47</sup> The first prayer (a) in the 1<sup>st</sup> *qānonā* before the putting of incense, asks the Lord to clothe them with the vestment of priesthood.<sup>48</sup> In the Episcopal ordination, in the prayer after the presentation of the bishop-candidate, the celebrant asks God to crown him with the crown of *Rabbut Kabnuta* (ܪܒܘܬ ܕܟܒܢܘܬܐ).<sup>49</sup> The first *Syamūda* prayer, both in priestly and Episcopal ordination, is of general nature and it is common to other orders except for the request specific to the service of priesthood (d-*kahnutha*) and episcopate.<sup>50</sup> When in the presbyteral ordination the grace of the Holy Spirit is requested “in view of the works of the service of the priesthood”, in the Episcopal ordination, the grace of the Holy Spirit is requested “in view of the service to which he draws near”.<sup>51</sup>

In the presbyteral ordination the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Syamūda* prayer asks for the specific priestly grace. The celebrant commemorates (anamnesis) the dispensation God in the past and then asks God to elect the servants by the descent (*magnanutha*) of the Holy Spirit to give them the word of truth when they open their mouths; to choose them to priesthood that they may «lay hand» on the sick (*kribe*) and heal them, to minister at the altar with pure heart and upright conscience, to offer oblations and sacrifices of praise, to consecrate through the sin-forgiving baptism for divine adoption and to absolve His people.<sup>52</sup> While placing the Gospel in the hands of the new priest the bishop says: “N....has been set apart, consecrated, made whole and brought to *plenitude* for the work of the ecclesiastical presbyterate and for the service of the Aaronic priesthood, in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit for ever.”<sup>53</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> *rūsmā* on the new bishop is made saying: “N.....is set apart, sanctified (consecrated),

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 154-155; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 99-100; Alencherrey, *Priesthood* = I. Alencherrey, *An Eastern Theology of Priesthood*, New Delhi, (1994), 17-18; Vosté, *Pontificale*, 38-39; Badger, *Nestorians II*, 333.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 144; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 94; Alencherrey, *Priesthood*, 9; Vosté, *Pontificale*, 31-2; Badger, *Nestorians II*, 331.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 157; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 101; Alencherrey, *Priesthood*, 19; Vosté, *Pontificale*, 39-40; Badger, *Nestorians II*, 334; also *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 134; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 84-85.

<sup>51</sup> The name of the service is not mentioned. From the context, the service he draws near is the spiritual and pastoral care of the faithful. Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 215-216; also 157; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 115 (n.358) also 101 (n.274).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 158-159; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 101-102; Alencherrey, *Priesthood*, 20 ; Vosté, *Pontificale*, 40-41; Badger, *Nestorians II*, 334-335.

<sup>53</sup> Alencherrey, *Priesthood*, 21; Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 159-160; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 102-3; Badger integrates the ideas into the concluding prayer. Badger, *Nestorians II*, 335-336.



completed for the great work of the diocese (episcopate) of N... city / N.....village, with all jurisdiction, in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen".<sup>54</sup> Thus in the Episcopal ordination the additional responsibilities envisaged are plenitude of pastoral responsibilities,<sup>55</sup> rather than priestly. In fact the notion of *plenitude of priesthood* is clearly mentioned in the third *rûsmâ* on the new priest where as there is no such reference to the plenitude of priesthood in the ordination of bishop.

#### 4.2. Additional Rites for Episcopal Ordination

The additional rites found in the Episcopal ordination in the Church of the East are the reading of the Gospel and the recitation of the *Syamida* prayer with the Gospel placed on the back of the Ordinandi.<sup>56</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> *Syamida* prayer for bishop is addressed to God the Father, for electing him with a holy election through the unction of the Holy Spirit that he may become perfect priest who imitates the high priest and to confirm him in the Holy Spirit in the service to which he draws near. The prayer further requests that the Episcopal candidate become light for those in darkness (Ps 107:10), educator (*radoya*) of those deficient

in thinking, teacher of children and the youth. The prayer further requests for the power from above to bind and loose on earth and in heaven, (Mt 16:19; 18:18), to heal the sick by the imposition of hand, to sanctify by the power of His Holy name, to make priests, deacons, subdeacons, readers and deaconesses through His grace, for the service of His Church, to gather and make grow (*nrabbe*) his people and the sheep of his flock and to perfect the souls entrusted to his care in the fear of God and purity. The emphasis of the prayer is for the grace to carry out the new and additional responsibilities as the head of a local Church centred in a city.<sup>57</sup>

The vestment that the priest puts on symbolise the mantle of justice and it is given to the priest that he might please God in all innocence, chastity and sanctity, all the days of his life on earth for ever.<sup>58</sup> In the Episcopal ordination, the *ma'pra* and *pallium* (*birona*) worn by the bishop symbolises the celestial habits (*estla*). The prayer indicates that God may wrap him with hidden and spiritual armour, adorn him with works of justice, make him resplendent with the gifts and succeed in chastity; so that he may shepherd the flock without blemish and blame, in his episcopate (*hassiuta*) or diocese in every fear of God and sanctity.<sup>59</sup> As evident from the liturgical actions

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ktaba d-takse kumraye, 218; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 117 (n.362).

<sup>55</sup> The "work of ecclesiastical presbyterate" and the "great work of the diocese".

<sup>56</sup> Vosté, *Pontificale*, 67-68; Ktaba d-takse kumraye, 211-214, 217; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 114,116-117.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Ktaba d-takse kumraye*, 217; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 116-117 (n.360).

<sup>58</sup> "May the Lord our God clothe you with the mantle of justice that you may please him in all innocence, chastity and sanctity, all the days of your life on earth for ever." Et: Alenchery, *Priesthood*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ktaba d-takse kumraye, 218; Yousif, *I Sacramenti*, 117 (n.361).



and prayers, the liturgy gives great importance to the sacramentality of the sacred orders with the three sacramental signings (*rūšmā*), «Laying on of hand» and the investiture. Since the ordinand is both the “matter” to be transformed and the beneficiary (person) or recipient of the mystery, there is only “one” triple signing and single epiclesis on the ordinand.

### 4.3. Liturgical Orders verses Hierarchy of Orders

Already from the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century the many of the liturgical orders became formally part of the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of the East. The orders borrowed from the West (Greek) also found place in the East Syrian canonical legislations, commentaries and the liturgical texts.<sup>60</sup> The canons of Marutha attempt to trace the origin of priests and “bishops” to the OT.<sup>61</sup> These orders were introduced into the Church of the East not for liturgical, but pastoral,

administrative and hierarchical reasons. The Synod of 410 does not assign any liturgical function specific to each and every order. The liturgical orders were gradually mixed up with hierarchical orders which were organised and divided into three ranks and they were given angel symbolism. But the angel symbolism does not synchronise with the East Syrian liturgical symbolism. In fact the East Syrian writers place those who are in the orders of priesthood who represent Christ in the sacramental celebrations on a high pedestal beyond the reach of angels who are at the service of the throne of God. Narsai says that although the angels are more subtle and glorified than the priest, the priest is greater than the Holy Seraph, glorious Gabriel and mighty Michael.<sup>62</sup> The incompatibility of angel symbolism with liturgical functions and symbolism is strongly exposed by the Anonymous Author with reasons in his liturgical commentary *Expositio*.

<sup>60</sup> The orders of Greek origin are: *Heupedyagna* (subdeacon), *chorapisgopa* (Chorbishop), *Arkedyaqon* (Archdeacon), *Appisgopa* (Bishop), *Metropolit* (Metropolitan), *Qatholiqa* (Catholicos) and *Patriyarka* (Patriarch). Patriarch means Father of heads or rulers; Metropolis means ‘mother of towns’. The term Catholicos has no explanation in Greek, in Syriac it is interpreted as ‘General’. The term catholicos in Greek means ‘the general calling’. Cf. Vööbus, *Canons of Maruta* = A. Vööbus, ed., *The Canons Ascribed to Maruta of Maipherqat and related sources*, CSCO 439-440 (SS 191-192), Lovanii, (1982), 7.

<sup>61</sup> “The tribe was divided into families in order that from them should come the priests, again from the others the Levites together with the rest from others who are in the tribe. And Moses was mystically the Patriarch and Aaron as a Bishop and his sons in the likeness of presbyters and he Levites in order as deacons together with the rest of those who were serving in the Order of the brothers in the temporal tent.” Vööbus, *Canons of Maruta*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> “O how slender is the pen of Thy mind to depict the mysteries! And yet there is no painter that is able to copy thy drawings. O Thou priest, how great is the order that Thou administertest, of which the ministers of fire and spirit stand in awe”. Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies* = Narsai, *Liturgical Homilies of Narsai*, R.H. Connolly, tr. Theological Studies 8, Cambridge, (1909), XXI, 47-48.



## 4.3.1. Priesthood (ܕܚܝܬܐ) in the Pontifical Rank

Ecclesiastical Order and ministers	Ministry in the Church <sup>63</sup>	Angelic order <sup>64</sup>	Liturgical Order & Priestly functions	Relation to Christ's Life and Ministry <sup>65</sup>
Qatholiqa (Catholicos) Patriarch <sup>66</sup>	The Patriarchs are responsible for governing the affairs of an entire Church, to consecrate Metropolitans and to confirm the appointment of the bishops.	Cherubim	Pontiff * All priestly functions	Jesus is said to have exercised this ministry when he entrusted the keys of the kingdom to Simon Peter
Metropolitan	All priestly functions * Metropolitans are responsible for the overseeing of a local Church with the See in a city..	Seraphim	Pontiff * All priestly functions including ordination to all orders including the consecration of the bishop for his diocese or province.	When he blessed his disciples giving them the authority in heaven and on earth and giving them the great missionary mandate to convert and baptise. (Lk 24:50; Mt 28:19-20)
Bishop (Overseer/ Episcopos)	All priestly functions * Bishops are overseers responsible for a (Hassuta) diocese.	Thrones * Throni	Pontiff All priestly functions including «Laying on of hand» on the candidates to all orders under him and consecration of church and Altar. <sup>67</sup>	Jesus exercised this order when he breathed on his disciples and imparted the Holy Spirit. (Jn 20:22-23)

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Synod of 410 in *Synodicon*, = J. B. Chabot, *Synodicon orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, publié, traduit et annoté par J. B. Chabot, d'après le ms. syriaque 332 de la Bibliothèque nationale et le ms. K. VI, 4 du Musée Borgia, à Rome. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, (1902), 23-36 (Ft: 263-275); Birnie, *Eastern Synods= The Eastern Synods, from the collection of the Nestorian Synods*, originally published in Aramaic and French by J. B. Chabot, Translated from Aramaic into English (draft copy), by M. J. Birnie, The Assyrian Church of the East - Diocese of the Western United States, for publication in San Jose, California, (1991), 1-15.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Abdisho, *Marganita* = Abdisho bar Brikha, *The Book of Marganitha (the Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity* written by Mar O'dishoo Metropolitan of Suwa (Nisibin) and Armenia; translated from Aramaic original by Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, Ernakulam: Mar Themotheus Memorial Printing & Publishing, 1965. Lt: in Maius, SVNC, tom.X, Rome, (1838), III, 8; *Liber Patrum= Liber Patrum*, S. Congregazione per la Chiesa Orientale, CCO, Fonti, Serie 2, fasc.16; Caldei-Diritto Antico III, Latine Interpretatus est Notis illustravit, J. M. Vosté, fonti, Vatican, (1940),



### 4.3.2. Priesthood (ܕܡܪܝܬܐ) in the Presbyteral Rank

Ecclesiastical Order and ministers	Ministry in the Church	Symbolism in the Angelic order <sup>68</sup>	Liturgical Order & Priestly functions	Relation to Christ's Life and Ministry <sup>69</sup>
Archdeacon <sup>70</sup>	Priestly functions, except those reserved to the bishop by law * Assigning priests to offer the Anaphora in the absence of bishops, to proclaim karoza and the Gospel etc <sup>71</sup>	Dominions * Dominiones	Priest * Priestly functions	The ministry of the Archdeacon is traced to the words of Jesus who instructed the twelve before they were sent out to preach the Gospel
Visitators or Periodeutes or Chorepiscopa (Chorbishop) <sup>72</sup>	Priestly functions, except those reserved to the bishop by law * Chorbishops are authorised to visit the rural parishes on behalf of the bishop who can not visit them himself.	Virtues * Virtutes	Priest * Priestly functions	When Jesus went around visiting villages and cities preaching and curing the sick. This office is attributed by AA to Jesus who proclaimed the good news in the synagogues of Judea. (Lk 4:43-44)
Qashishe (ܩܪܝܬܐ) Presbyters <sup>3</sup> or elders.	Priestly functions of offering sacrifices and administering of the Rāzê except those reserved to the bishop by law.	Powers * Potestates	Priest * Priestly functions	When Jesus gave his body and blood to his disciples.

21-36; *BibOr* = J. S. Assemani, *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clementino Vaticanae de Scriptoribus Syris*, I-II-III/1-2, Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Romae, 1719-1728; reprint: Hildesheim/New York, (1975), III/2, 792.

<sup>65</sup> See L. Arangassery, *Sacramentality of the Mysteries in the Church of the East*, UDD, PIO, Rome (2007), Ch. 6:1.2 & 1.3; *Expositio* I = *Anonymi Auctoris Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae*, Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta; I, interpretatus est. R. H. Connolly, *CSCO* 71, series II, (SS 28), tom. 91, Rome, 1913; *Syr. CSCO* 64 (SS 25), Paris, (1911), memra 2:6; Anonymus, *Commentary* = *A Commentary on the Mass by the Nestorian George, Bishop of Mosul and Arbel (10th century)*, Translated from the Syriac by R. H. Connolly (1909), R. Matheus, ed., OIRSI 243, Kottayam, (2000) 9-10; *Liber Patrum*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Vööbus, *Canons of Maruta*, 7; Soro, "Priesthood", 99.

<sup>67</sup> These two liturgical functions are known as *kakras* (talents).

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Abdisho, *Marganita*, III, 8; *Liber Patrum*, 21-36; *BibOr* III/2, 792.

<sup>69</sup> See ch.6:1.2 & 1.3; *Expositio* I, memra 2:6; Anonymus, *Commentary*, 9-10; *Liber Patrum*, 11.



## 4.3.3. Ministers in the Deaconal Rank

Ecclesiastical Order and ministers <sup>74</sup>	Ministry in the Church	Angelic order <sup>75</sup>	Liturgical Order & Priestly functions	Relation to Christ's Life and Ministry <sup>76</sup>
Diaconate <i>M'samšanutha</i>	Read Apostles, to announce, etc	Principality * Principatus	Minister * Assist the priest and at	When Jesus washed the feet of the disciples
(ܡܫܡܫܢܐ) ■ Deacon <i>Mešammšana</i> (ܡܫܡܫܢܐ)			the altar, read Epistle, proclaim karozythas and litanies, diptychs, exhort etc at the celebration of the Mysteries	
<i>Henpedyaqna</i> (ܚܢܦܕܝܩܢܐ) (Sub-deacon)	They are to sweep, clean and decorate the Church, light the lamps and to guard the doors	Archangels * Archangeli	Minister * Assist the deacons in liturgy. <sup>77</sup>	When Jesus expelled the buyers and sellers from and purified the temple. Jn 2:12-17
Qaroya (ܩܪܝܐ) (Reader) <sup>78</sup>	Read from OT (Law & Prophets) and Acts of the Apostles.	Angels (Angeli)	Minister * Ministry of the word from OT	Jesus became a reader, when Jesus took the book to read from Isaiah in the synagogue Lk 4:16-17

<sup>70</sup> For the details of the functions, rights, privileges and obligations of Archdeacons, see Kollaparampil, Archdeacon, 15, 23, 26-27, 59 and 207-235; Soro, "Priesthood", 98.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Kollaparampil, *Archdeacon* = J. Kollaparambil, *The Archdeacon of All India, A Historico-Juridical Study*, Rome (1972), 59.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Expositio* I, memra 2:6; Anonymous, *Commentary*, 9-10; *Liber Patrum*, 11; Soro, "Priesthood", 98.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Anonymous, *Commentary*, 9-10; Cf. also Soro, "Priesthood", 97-98

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Anonymous, *Commentary*, 9-10; Cf. also Soro, "Priesthood", 97

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Abdisho, *Marganita*, III, 8; *Liber Patrum*, 21-36; cf. BibOr III/2, 792.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Arangassery, *Sacramentality of the Mysteries*, see Chapter 6.1.2 & 1.3; *Expositio* I, 2:6; Anonymous, *Commentary*, 9-10; *Liber Patrum*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Vööbus, *Canons of Maruta*, CSCO 440, Soro, "Priesthood", 97

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Soro, "Priesthood", 97

The second Vatican Council traces the theological basis of the hierarchical<sup>79</sup> structure to the sacramental character of the Church (LG 1). The Council, however, sticks on to the three-tier hierarchical structure (LG 24-29). The ultimate purpose of the hierarchy is to represent the one Lord and to bring the flock in a locality under a single pastor who teaches, sanctifies and governs. Although LG says that a bishop is marked with the “fullness of the sacrament of orders”, it affirms that the Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which is united with their pastors<sup>80</sup> who are not always necessarily “bishops”. Therefore the hierarchy ‘organises’ all the aspects of the mission of Christ under a unified head, but with an inherent duality necessitated by the hierarchy of orders and hierarchy of jurisdiction.<sup>81</sup>

The East Syrian liturgical tradition does not contradict the ultimate purpose of the hierarchy, that is, to unite the Church under one head and to represent one Lord. But the liturgical tradition of the Church of the East

does not seem to support the three-tier hierarchy, but a two-tier hierarchy. The liturgical tradition makes a clear distinction between the true orders of priesthood and the orders of service.<sup>82</sup> The order of *Mešamšanuta* (ܡܝܫܡܫܢܘܬܐ) is an independent foundational mystery, for it does not belong to the “true orders of priesthood”. The order of *Mešamšanuta* belongs to the order of service (*diakonia*) with its subsidiary mysteries (ܡܝܫܡܫܢܘܬܐ), *Heupedyaqna* etc.<sup>83</sup>. In fact, the Council clearly affirms that the hands are imposed on the deacons “not unto the priesthood, but unto a ministry of service” (SC 29). It is strange, however, to observe that some of the duties assigned to the deacons in LG are “priestly” and typically Latin<sup>84</sup> and does not reflect universal tradition.

The two tier hierarchy consisting of two principal foundational orders, viz. the *orders of priesthood* which comprise episcopacy, presbyterate and their subsidiaries<sup>85</sup> and the *orders of service* with their subsidiaries, seem to be more faithful to the apostolic tradition of

<sup>79</sup> The term “hierarchy” is of Greek origin and etymologically the term *hiera arche* means holy origin or holy dominion.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. LG 26; Gal. 6, 15; 2 Cor. 5, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. K. Moersdorf, “Hierarchy”, in K. Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, New York: The Seabury press, (1975), 615-618.

<sup>82</sup> Lonappan Arangassery, *Orders of Priesthood and Orders of Service: An East Syrian Perspective*, OIRSI 306, Kottayam 2008.

<sup>83</sup> Many more can be added to it by the Church such as cantors, exorcists, preachers, etc depending on the new exigencies.

<sup>84</sup> The duties assigned to the deacon in LG are: “to administer baptism solemnly, to be custodian and dispenser of the Eucharist, to assist at and bless marriages in the name of the Church, to bring Viaticum to the dying, to read the Sacred Scripture to the faithful, to instruct and exhort the people, to preside over the worship and prayer of the faithful, to administer sacramentals, to officiate at funeral and burial services”. LG 29.

<sup>85</sup> Archdeacon and Chorepiscopa.



the twelve and seven (Acts 6:1-6) and the East Syrian liturgical tradition. The apostles, imitating Christ the priest engaged themselves in the mission of preaching, sanctifying and pasturing (Acts 2:41-48; 6:1-2&4), while deacons (*diakonoi*) were 'ordained' for the service (*diakonia*) (Acts 6:1&3) imitating Christ the servant. Referring to the embryonic hierarchy which excludes deacons and priests (i.e. presbyters and bishops) St Paul writes: "God appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues".<sup>86</sup>

### 5. "Fullness of Priesthood"

The fullness of priesthood is today understood and interpreted more in terms of power and jurisdiction enjoyed by the bishop thanks to his episcopal ordination. The distinction and separation of the ministry of elders who were responsible for settled or stabilised Churches and the assigning of a lower rank to the presbyters in the newly invented three-tier hierarchical order is a post-didache development. The Church being a divine and a human institution, its fast growth historically and ecclesiastically necessitated the gradual emergence of the elders of prominent

Sees as *Episcopoi* (overseers) over smaller communities around the prominent Sees. Although there is justification for a three tier model of hierarchy from historical and ecclesiastical points of view, we lack theological and liturgical justification for such an understanding of hierarchy.<sup>87</sup>

The crux of the problem is our answer to the question: In what does the "fullness of priesthood" consist? The liturgy of the orders of priesthood makes it clear that the exercise of the plenitude of priesthood by the presbyters was restricted by ecclesiastical law for administrative and pastoral reasons as well as to emphasise the unity of the local Church under a single head (head priest/ bishop) chosen to shepherd the people with the assistance of the presbyters (heads of smaller ecclesial units). The new rites introduced into the rite of the ordination of bishop do not disturb the core of the rite of Priesthood. New rites were introduced into the liturgy of the ordination of bishops in order to emphasise their pre-eminence and ecclesiastical authority granted to them for the governance of the Christian community.

The primary concerns of early Fathers like St Ignatius of Antioch<sup>88</sup> who is one of the earliest protagonist of *three-tier* hierarchy, the

<sup>86</sup> 2 Cor 12:28; see also Eph 4:11-13.

<sup>87</sup> For detailed discussion see: L. Arangassery, *Orders of Priesthood and Orders of Service: An East Syrian Perspective*, OIRSI 306, Kottayam-2008.

<sup>88</sup> The following are the relevant issues and references in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. The hierarchy of the Church was instituted by Christ (Introd. *Ad Philad.*; *Ad Ephes.*, vi); the threefold character of the hierarchy (*ad Magn.*, vi); the order of the episcopacy is superior by Divine authority to that of the priesthood (*ad Magn.*, vi, xiii; *ad Smyrn.*, viii; *ad Trall.*, iii); the unity of the Church (*ad Trall.*, vi; *ad Philad.*, iii; *ad Magn.*, xiii); the holiness of the Church (*ad Smyrn.*, *ad Ephes.*, *ad Magn.*, *ad Trall.*, and *ad Rom.*); the catholicity of the Church (*ad Smyrn.*, viii).

council of Trent<sup>89</sup> and the second Vatican council<sup>90</sup> seem to be safeguarding of ecclesiastical hierarchy from falling into charismatic hierarchy. The *three-tier* understanding of the sacred orders and the bishop-centred theology of priesthood demand, therefore, a re-thinking in order to re-instate the sacramentality of the priest centred ministerial priesthood, without, however, falling into “charismatic” hierarchy or diluting the unity of the local Church under the head-priest who represents Christ, the head of the mystical body. The independent identity of the *orders of Service* from the orders of priesthood also need to be established which would open up tremendous possibilities for accommodating new offices, “services” and ministries which have evolved in the Church which may not have any liturgical or pastoral significance.<sup>91</sup> This would also help us re-discover the sacramentality of the sacred orders which are distinct from other offices in the Church which may not have “clerical” overtones.

In the biblical and liturgical tradition as well as in the Church documents which discuss the nature of priesthood and priestly ministry, the *fullness of priesthood* is understood more in

terms of close imitation of Christ the good shepherd who offered his life on the cross for the salvation of all becoming daily a living victim and an offerer (Heb 5). “The identity of the priest comes from the specific participation in the Priesthood of Christ, in which the one ordained becomes, in the Church and for the Church, a real, living and faithful image of Christ the Priest, “a sacramental representation of Christ, Head and Shepherd”.”<sup>92</sup>

The power, that a priest receives in ordination is spiritual power. Through consecration, the priest “receives a spiritual ‘power’ as a gift which is a participation in the authority with which Jesus Christ, through his Spirit, guides the Church”.<sup>93</sup> The fullness of priesthood must be understood in terms of this sacramental identification with the Eternal High Priest which specifically inserts the priest into the trinitarian mystery and, through the mystery of Christ, into the ministerial Communion of the Church so as to serve the People of God.<sup>94</sup> The priest shares not only in the mystery of Christ the Priest, Master, Head and Shepherd but also in Christ “Servant and Spouse of the Church”.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Council of Trent, session 23, De Sacr. Ordinis, ch.2, and canon 6.

<sup>90</sup> Vatican II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen gentium* 28; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 7; Decree *Christus Dominus* 28; Decree *Ad gentes* 19; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* 17.

<sup>91</sup> Roman Curia Officials, delegates, ambassadors, nuncios, heads of congregations, councils, etc.

<sup>92</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 11.

<sup>93</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 21; Vatican II, Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, 2; 12.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 12c, Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 00120 Citta del Vaticano (1994), n. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 3, Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 00120 Citta del Vaticano (1994), n. 13.



The priest finds *fullness of priesthood* to the extent he imitates Christ who loves the Church which is his body to the extent of giving himself for her (cf Eph 5:25) and to the extent he renews her and purifies her continually by means of the Word of God and of the sacraments (cf Eph 5:26) and make her always more beautiful (cf Eph 5:27), and lastly, to the extent he nourishes the Church and treats her with care (cf Eph 5:29).<sup>96</sup> Both bishops and presbyters participate in the same priesthood of Christ and the presbyters collaborate with the bishop. Juridically the presbyters who form one presbyterium with the bishop are subject to the bishop who is entrusted with an episcopate and the presbyters exercise priestly functions under the bishop. The presbyters are subject to the bishop.

According to the Roman Rite of the episcopal ordination, the bishop is wedded to the local Church (diocese) as indicated by the rite of gifting of a ring in the ordination.<sup>97</sup> And he is entrusted with the governance of an episcopate (diocese) with the collaboration of the presbyterium.<sup>98</sup> In the East Syrian tradition it is in the Syamida (Laying on of hand) prayer reference is made to the fullness of priesthood and there is no mention at all about the fullness of priesthood in the Symida

prayer over the bishop. In this tradition, except in the liturgical assembly, the bishop represents God the Father as the head, pastor, and the overseer of the entire local Church.

Concluding our discussion on the understanding of priesthood and fullness of priesthood in the New Testament, in the apostolic and post apostolic Church as well as in the liturgical Tradition of the Church of the East, it may be said that the ministry, whether charismatic or institutionalised, is a constituent part of the Church and it is orientated for the building up of the Church interiorly through baptism and the Eucharist and exteriorly through spirit guided "overseeing" and "leading" of the Church which is the "community of God", "community of Christ" and the "temple of the Holy Spirit". Priesthood is a gift of the Lord to the Church through the Holy Spirit who descends on the candidate at the Laying on of hand. The fullness of priesthood and the sacramentality of the orders of Priesthood lived by a bishop or a presbyter must be traced to his priestly or sacramental identity as priest in the liturgical assembly or as a sacred/liturgical person who represents Christ, the true priest. There is no distinction between the priesthood exercised by *episcopoi* and *Qashishe*

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 00120 Citta del Vaticano (1994), n. 13

<sup>97</sup> Vatican II, Const. *Lumen gentium* 28; Pontificale Romanum *Ordinatio Episcoporum Presbyterorum et diaconorum* cap. I, n. 51, ed. typica altera, (1990), 26.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Vatican II, Const. *Lumen gentium* 28; Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 7; Decree *Christus Dominus* 28; Decree *Ad gentes* 19; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* 17

(*presbyteroi*) in the liturgical assembly, although the Church has reserved the exercise of certain liturgical and pastoral functions<sup>99</sup> to *Episcopoi* who are high-priests.<sup>100</sup> Violence is done to the greatest and most valued gift of the Lord to His Church, when the plenitude of

priesthood is measured with the yardstick of the special juridical and pastoral powers given to the bishop for the building up of the Church and for the preservation of its unity under a single pastor.

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<sup>99</sup> That is the 'Power of Jurisdiction' spoken of in the ecclesiastical law.

<sup>100</sup> "But priests and Levites now are the presbyters and deacons, and the orphans and widows- but the Levite and the high priest is the bishop". *Didascalia*, IX, CSCO 402, 100.

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# SAINT ALPHONSA: A FAITHFUL BRIDE OF CHRIST\*

Msgr. Paul Pallath

## Introduction

On the eve of the canonization of Alphonsa many people, including journalists from India asked me: what did Alphonsa do during her life time? A Hindu journalist from North India inquired: “why this unknown woman from a corner of Kerala is canonized before Mother Teresa, a public model of charity and a genius of spirituality? She thought that canonization is simply a human act of the Pope, without any divine intervention. The ecclesiastical authorities in Rome, who should have presented the historical profile of Alphonsa at the public consistory on 1 March 2008 and at the canonization ceremony on 12 October 2008 found it difficult to describe the activities of Alphonsa and limited themselves to a very brief presentation. In fact Alphonsa did not found any religious congregation, did not even become a mother superior of her own community. She did not write any book; not only she refused to write down her spiritual experiences, but also obliged her mother superior Sr Mary Ursula to destroy the scattered notes jotted down for personal use, saying: “Mother, for God’s sake, no one should know anything about me...No one

should think of me after my death. I am a very stupid person, a useless worm. There is nothing special or spiritual about me. I am a mere nothingness. But if God wills, he will find a way for people to come to know of my life...”<sup>1</sup> She lived only for a short period of 36 years, withdrawn from the world without any public activity and practically confined to her sick bed. Her life was eventless, obscure and devoid of any achievements according to the worldly standard.

The greatness of Alphonsa becomes fathomable only when we peep deep in to her life with the eyes of Christian faith, and evaluate it in the light of spiritual principles and gospel message concerning discipleship.<sup>2</sup> In order to glance at her profound spiritual life, I have chosen the theme: “Saint Alphonsa as a faithful bride of Christ”, because in a few letters that survived and in her conversations with her spiritual directors and superiors she qualified herself as a bride of Christ, the celestial Bridegroom and during the whole of her life she endeavoured to adorn herself with virtues in order to become a worthy bride at the feet of Christ.

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\* This is the paper presented at the Symposium on the spiritual legacy of St Alphonsa held at the Chavara Institute of Indian and Interreligious Studies (CIIS) in Rome on 21 February 2009.

<sup>1</sup> G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, Aluva 2008, 3.

<sup>2</sup> In an article I made a humble attempt for such a study already in 1989. See P. Pallath, “Blessed Alphonsa’s Spirituality”, *The Passion Flower*, vol. 34 (February-May 1989) 4-14.

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In order to comprehend the validity and heroic nature of her life we have to examine: what did Alphonsa receive from God and from her celestial Bridegroom? How did she react and comport herself in front of enormous difficulties from the very moment of her birth and of excruciating pain that crippled her life?

## 1. A Motherless Child without Parental Affection

Annakutty was born on 19 August 1910 and after three months her mother died, leaving her as a motherless child, without any maternal care and affection. Practically she lived for early ten years infancy (1910-1920) with her grandmother in Kudamalur. So she could not even receive the paternal affection. On 30 November 1943 Sister Alphonsa wrote to Fr. Louis Perumalil CMI: "I thank God because he has given me such a good father and a mother who too was so good. I have not enjoyed the family care and attention of my parents nor their embraces. In fact, my mother died soon after my birth and therefore I could not enjoy her motherly affection; since I was educated in my grandmother's house I could not experience the affection of my father either..."<sup>3</sup> It is evident that during her early childhood she suffered from the lack of parental affection and loving care.

One of the most important events during that period was the reception of first holy Communion on 11 November 1917 at

the age of seven. As she herself revealed, that day was one of the happiest in her life, because Jesus came to her heart. Referring back to that happy event Alphonsa wrote to her spiritual father Luis CMI on 30 November 1943: "Already from 7 years of age I am no longer mine. I had dedicated my whole being to my Divine Bridegroom".<sup>4</sup>

The next seven years (1921-1927) she lived with her aunt Annamma Muricken in Muttuchira, where Alphonsa had to suffer much, because of the severe discipline imposed upon her without even a minimum of freedom. Annamma, despite her love, dominated with imposing authority, pronouncing sentences without appeal and severely punishing the motherless child even without any reason. About her aunt, whom she qualifies as her mother, Alphonsa wrote later:

My mother used to scold me even for very small mistakes. For no reason was I allowed to justify myself. Having grown up with this mute resistance and patience, it was impossible for me to respond even with a small gesture. My mother did not allow me any liberty. I had to speak always in a submissive voice...My mother often got angry with me and this caused me much grief. I used to shudder due to fear. Perhaps, so much fear was caused due to the death of my own mother. If I tried to excuse myself or justify myself when she reprimanded me, I was looked upon as a criminal. If I tried to

<sup>3</sup> K. C. Chacko, *Sister Alphonsa*, Bharananganam 2000, 31; G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super virtutibus*, vol. 2, Roma 1984, 314.



maintain my peace and calm, I was accused of stubbornness. Look! Instead of answering anything, she doesn't even utter a single word" – she used to comment. If I tried to say something she immediately burst out: "So you have the courage to answer me back?...<sup>5</sup>

Even for small faults, true or believed to be true, her aunt punished her by beating her or smacking her shouting all the while: "get out of here!" and she used to conduct her to the door. Normally, Annakutty used to go out through the back door of the house to a corner of the courtyard and remained there until her aunt called her back.<sup>6</sup> During her stay in Muttuchira she used to say to her school companions: "You have a mother, but I have not got a mother".<sup>7</sup> These repeated statements demonstrate her inner pain, ensuing from the lack of parental affection, aggravated by the ill-treatment in Muttuchira.

## 2. Fidelity to the Divine Bridegroom Proved in Fire

When Annakutty began her third year Middle School (1923-24), at the age of 13-14, it was the ripe age for marriage for a girl in Kerala at that time. Since Annakutty was a very beautiful, amiable and smart girl, boys were ready to marry her even without a dowry. Her dreadful aunt fixed the betrothal and made all the arrangements without asking anything to Annakutty, who understood very well what it meant, since she had already seen the engagement and the marriage of her two

elder sisters. At that epoch in the socio-cultural context of Kerala the parents decided the marriage and an young girl of thirteen could not have done anything. In order to avoid the betrothal ceremony Annakutty resorted to an extreme measure. On that morning when she was to be engaged, she decided to burn her feet in the ditch nearby where chaff and hay were left to burn after the rice harvest. Although her intention was to burn only the feet, she had fallen into the ditch inadvertently, against her own will. Annakutty herself related the event to her Spiritual Father Louis as follows:

My engagement was fixed when I had completed 13 years. What should I have done to avoid it? Ornaments and jewels were prepared for me very hurriedly. My mother hassled me with the question of marriage. I prayed the whole night before the engagement. Then an idea came to my mind. If my body were to be a little disfigured, nobody would have asked my hand in marriage. There was this big ditch in the plot of land near the house, a pit where the chaff and hay were left to burn at the end of the rice harvest season (the pit was about five meters long and one meter deep).

Early in the morning I rose up and went to the ditch so that I might burn my feet a little. But I slipped and fell completely into the pit...How I suffered! I offered everything for my big intention (to consecrate myself to the Lord). Ninety days later, with the constant cure

<sup>5</sup> G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 82-83.

<sup>6</sup> G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Canonizationis Servae Dei Alphonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super virtutibus*, vol. 2, 842.

of the doctor, all the wounds were more or less completely healed...Although I was cured, I was not able to walk until after a long period of medical treatment. I was afraid that my feet and my fingers would not have returned to normal as they are now.<sup>8</sup>

This was an act of heroism, because Annakutty, who blindly obeyed her aunt in everything, resolutely rejected the proposal of marriage, because she wanted to be a faithful bride of Christ, whom alone she wanted to love with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her mind and with all her strength.<sup>9</sup> After her cure, there were also other proposals of marriage, but somehow Annakutty thwarted all of them with assiduous prayer, unshakable courage and firm determination. Evaluating her whole life with her aunt Prof. Segalla writes: "Those seven years of life at Muttuchira helped Annakutty to mature humanly and spiritually. We could say that the strict discipline of her aunt to which Annakutty subjected herself humbly and gently, was a kind of severe pre-novitiate. A pre-novitiate, because she had to defend with heroic fortitude that sublime ideal of hers, which she had already divulged to her elder sister Elizabeth when she was 11 or 12 years old: Jesus is my only Spouse and no one else".<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Fidelity Tested under Trials and Sufferings (1927-1936)

Overcoming all the objections and hurdles, on the Feast of Pentecost, 24 May

1927 Annakutty entered the boarding school of the Congregation of the Franciscan Clarists at Bharananganam as a boarder to continue the middle school studies for two years (1927-1929), but from that time she began to live as a fervent religious aspirant in her heart. In the beginning of the second year, precisely on 2 August 1928, on the feast of St Alphonse Liguori Annakutty received the head veil and a uniform which distinguished her from other boarders as a postulant. She changed her name and in honour of the saint of the day adopted the new name: Alphonsa of Immaculate Conception.

Although she became a postulant, her tenacious and stubborn aunt, all her relatives including her beloved father wanted Alphonsa to embrace the married state of life and they also selected the bridegroom. Even the mistress of postulants Sr. Clara wanted the beautiful, intelligent and lovable Alphonsa to marry her nephew, belonging to a rich and religious minded family. To the Postulant Mistress, Sr. Clara, who continued to pester her to marry, Alphonsa always replied very firmly: "I don't want to marry. I have already chosen Jesus as my bridegroom in this poor Congregation of St. Francis of Assisi".<sup>11</sup>

After two years of studies Alphonsa had to go home for vacation in Muttuchira. Knowing that she returned home for holidays, marriage preparations were accelerated. When Alphonsa reached home, she noticed a jeweller

<sup>8</sup> K. C. Chacko, *Sister Alphonsa*, 47-49; G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 98-100.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Mt* 22: 37; *Mk* 12: 30; *Lk* 10: 27.

<sup>10</sup> G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 103.

<sup>11</sup> For details concerning the efforts of the Postulant Mistress to induce Alphonsa to marriage, see *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super causae introductione*, Roma 1977, 199-200.



in a corner of the house, preparing ornaments to adorn her on her wedding day and her aunt was making all the other necessary preparations. Seeing that after endless supplication and tears her aunt would not be moved, Alphonsa turned to her uncle as a last resort entreating and imploring him: "My dear uncle, on account of the five sacred wounds of our Lord, save me, and do not force me into this marriage"! Moved by her pleas he decided to help her and forbade his wife Annamma to insist on marriage and told her to let Annakutty go where her heart led her.<sup>12</sup> When the vacation was over she returned to the convent in Bharananganam. A year before her death, in 1945 Alphonsa told her relative, Sr. Mary Agatha Muttathupadathu about the arranged marriage proposal as follows: "Even after I had put on the veil and received the habit of the postulant, my aunt and my Mistress of the postulants tried to coerce me into marriage. In those days my mistress was telling me harshly: My daughter, you haven't any vocation. You should choose the married life. God saw the anguish of my heart in those days. God allayed my fears and difficulties and I embraced this state of life".<sup>13</sup>

She passed the seventh standard and with the diploma she was allowed to teach in primary classes. But Alphonsa was one of the two sisters selected for further studies in a High School. So she had to stay at the Clarist convent in Changanacherry to attend the school run

by the Adoration Sisters at Vazhappally. Alphonsa passed the eighth standard easily, but she could not complete the ninth standard on account of her ill health; she suffered from haemorrhage of the mouth and the nose, thus losing a lot of blood. Anyhow on 19 May 1930 the ceremony of vestition was conducted and together with seven other postulants Alphonsa also received the religious habit.

Her sickness was cured and on the feast of St Clare, 12 August 1935 Alphonsa could enter the novitiate at Changanacherry under the guidance of the novice mistress Mother Ursula. After one week her bleeding from the nose and eyes commenced, weakening her and leaving her bed-ridden. In this difficult situation mother Ursula considered sending her back to Bharananganam, interrupting her novitiate. Before a definite decision Mother Ursula sought the counsel of Bishop James Kalassery, who visited Alphonsa and personally conversed with her. Impressed by the simplicity and ardour of Sr. Alphonsa the Bishop decided that she should remain in the novitiate. Therefore he told Mother Ursula: "Leave her here. It is the will of God, if she has to die here".<sup>14</sup>

After a few days, in accordance with the advice of Fr. Louis CMI, they started a novena in honour of Fr. Chavara Kuriakose Elias, at that time a servant of God and on the ninth day Alphonsa was miraculously cured. Afterwards she successfully completed the

<sup>12</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super causae introductione*, 200-201.

<sup>13</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super virtutibus*, vol. 2, 424.

<sup>14</sup> *Passion Flower* 19 (1973) 31.

novitiate and on 12 August 1936, coinciding with the feast of St Clare, Alphonsa made her perpetual profession as a Franciscan Clarist religious sister. Mother Ursula, the novice mistress, narrates the great spiritual progress made by Alphonsa and her intention to consecrate herself to Christ as follows: "She wanted to crown her novitiate, by offering herself as a holocaust of love to her Divine Spouse. She consulted me and the master of novices and we know very well her interior disposition. We who knew her interior life intimately, gave our consent very willingly to fulfil her ardent desire. She wrote down these words and carried them by her heart on the day of her perpetual profession: "Lord make me what you want of me...I am yours. Her entire life was a continuous implementation of this initial sacrificial act".<sup>15</sup>

Two days after the perpetual profession, after returning to Bharanangamam Alphonsa wrote on 14 August 1936: "I desire ardently to be one of your most fervent of spouses...My sole desire is to love the Lord to perfection...I sealed my union with my Divine Spouse by professing my perpetual vows to Him on 12 August 1936 and I reached here on 14 August. From then it seems to me that the Lord has given me a share of His cross to carry..."<sup>16</sup>

#### 4. Fidelity Ratified on the Cross (1936-1946)

The period after the final profession, from 1936 to 1946, with the exception of a few intervals, was marked by excruciating pain,

various illnesses, traumatic incidents, grave travails, mental agonies and painful convulsions. The suffering of Alphonsa initiated with the death of her mother at the age of three months, aggravated during her sojourn with her stubborn aunt in Muttuchira for seven years and continued even after her entrance in the convent in Bharananganam because of uncertainty concerning the ardently desired religious life, provoked by some illnesses of this period and by the continuous proposals of marriage made even by her religious superiors, culminated after the perpetual profession in a gradual but cruel crucifixion, which lasted until her last breath.

In the face of such a grave tragedy and atrocious sufferings modern secularized man would say: God does not exist or with the modern atheist philosophers people would pronounce the death sentence of God: God has died or would grumble: God is a masochist who takes pleasure in the pain of human beings. But what did Alphonsa say?

Alphonsa said: "I am loving God". To Bishop James Kalacherry who asked her what she did at night when she lay awake because of pain, she responded simply: "I love".<sup>17</sup> That means she was loving God and was participating in the sufferings of her Bridegroom. Alphonsa also said:

I am on the cross. When our Lord was crucified, how much more was the pain that he endured when compared to mine? He was unable to move his limbs even a little. I can shift myself on my bed, but He could not. I

<sup>15</sup> *Passion Flower* 13 (1968) 8.

<sup>16</sup> Autobiographical Notes of Alphonsa, in G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 165-167.

<sup>17</sup> G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 164 & 200.



have a pillow, but he did not have one. There was no one to console Him, while I enjoy the benefit of having my sisters around me to whisper words of comfort to me and thus to sympathise with me. My sufferings are not comparable with the great agony that my Divine Spouse endured. I must drink the chalice of pain to the dregs. My Lord is trying me to my limits to see if I am tired already. No. I am not tired. The grim reality of sufferings does not frighten me. My Lord, make me suffer more".<sup>18</sup>

Alphonsa considered poverty and sufferings as the riches of her Spouse and that they were all her wealth and were to be accepted with joy. She was firmly convinced that a bride of Christ should imitate him and even identify herself with him, especially participating in his sufferings and kenosis so as to become worthy of her divine Groom.

The love of Alphonsa for her Divine Spouse was unselfish, unconditional, complete, disinterested and never-ending. In a letter to her novice master on 30 November 1943 she wrote: "I am now certain that God does not intend me to enjoy any of the pleasures of this world; nor do I desire them. I do not lose my peace of mind when faced with grief and suffering... Since only grief and suffering have fallen into the lot of my Spouse, I too lovingly

embrace them, and all my soul is at peace, though my body continues to be tormented. For the last seven years I have ceased to be my own, being given over entirely to my Divine Spouse. You know all that, and let the Lord do as he will with me. It is not a cure I am anxious for, but only that His Holy Will be fulfilled in me".<sup>19</sup>

Alphonsa could surely say with St Paul: What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (*Romans* 8: 35-39). Alphonsa could also say: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (*Gal.* 2: 20).

## 5. Lifelong Fidelity as a Spotless and Sainly Bride

There are different kinds of saints in the Church. All the Apostles, namely the first bishops, deserted Christ at the moment of his arrest and they fled.<sup>20</sup> St Peter, the first Pope thrice publically denied Christ, saying, "I do not know the man".<sup>21</sup> In his younger years St Augustine led a reckless life and he had an

<sup>18</sup> Romulus, *Snehabaly (The Sacrifice of Love)*, Bharananganam 1994, 70-71, English translation as in G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 199.

<sup>19</sup> K. C. Chacko, *Sister Alphonsa*, 75; B. M. Kottanalloor, *Blessed Alphonsa the Little Flower of India: A Study of the Influence of St. Thérèse of Lisieux upon Blessed Alphonsa's Spirituality and Its Ongoing Effects in the Syro-Malabar Church*, pars dissertationis ad lauream in Facultate S. Theologiae apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Romae 2007, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Mt* 26: 56; *Mk* 14: 50; cf. *Lk* 22: 53-55; *Jn* 18: 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Mt* 26: 69-75; *Mk* 14: 66-72; *Lk* 22: 56-62; *Jn* 18: 15-18, 25-27

illegitimate son before his conversion. The great St Paul persecuted, arrested and imprisoned Christians before he was called by Christ to become the apostle of the gentiles.<sup>22</sup> There are numerous saints who led a sinful life before they embraced Christ and were illumined by the light of the Gospel.

Alphonsa, however, is a different kind of saint. From the early years she was determined to become a saint. Reflecting on her childhood Alphonsa said: "I avoided every imperfection diligently. I had nothing to say in my first confession (at the age of seven). I aspired zealously to become a saint. I felt that burning desire after reading the autobiography of St. Theresa of Lisieux".<sup>23</sup> In the autobiographical notes which she penned on 14 August 1936 we read: "My sole desire is to love the Lord to perfection. I would rather die than commit even a small venial sin".<sup>24</sup> Towards the end of her life, in a letter to her spiritual director Fr. Luis, dated 14 march 1945, while experiencing the spiritual night of the soul she revealed: "He (the Lord) must have punished me for my failure to live up to the graces He has bestowed on me. I have completely abandoned myself to Him. Let him do with me what he wills. I have examined my conscience and I do not find any willful offence".<sup>25</sup> A few months before her death

she again wrote to the same spiritual Director that during her whole lifetime she never deliberately committed even a venial sin.<sup>26</sup>

In brief, from the time of her baptism until her death Alphonsa preserved her baptismal grace, original innocence and sanctity, and always remained faithful to her heavenly Bridegroom. There was not a time when Alphonsa was not a saint. In the life of Alphonsa we can find absolute, complete, constant and never-ending fidelity to Jesus Christ, despite all sinister events, insurmountable difficulties and atrocious pain that hurdled her ways until the moment of her death.

The whole life of Alphonsa was entirely centred on Christ. She considered him as her Divine Spouse and loved him with an undivided heart, desiring to become a small spark of the fire of love that inflames his Sacred Heart, from the age of reason until the moment of her death on 28 July 1946, when she departed from this world to meet her celestial Bridegroom in the heavenly bridal chamber, with her lamp full of oil and dressed in the beautiful garment of glory. The Divine Providence has so designed that this completely faithful, ever-loving, entirely spotless and fully devoted bride of Christ should be the first canonized woman-saint of India.



<sup>22</sup> Acts 8: 1-3; 9:1-2.

<sup>23</sup> Romulus, *Snehabaly (The Sacrifice of Love)*, 19; K. C. Chacko, *Sister Alphonsa*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> Sr. Alphonsa, *Spiritual Diary 1936*, in G. Segalla, *St. Alphonsa: the First Indian Woman Saint*, 167.

<sup>25</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super causae introductione*, 325; K. C. Chako, *Sister Alphonsa*, 40-42.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Canonizationis Servae Dei Alfonsae ab Immaculata Conceptione, Positio super virtutibus*, vol. 2, 316-317.



# THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN CONTEMPORARY CHRISTOLOGY

*Dr. Sebastian Chalakkal*

## Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances are explained in various ways today.<sup>1</sup> We can find theologians who give a prominent position to the resurrection of Jesus in their writings and who consider the post-resurrection appearances

very important when they speak about the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> For some others the resurrection of Jesus is only a mythical event.<sup>3</sup> Some reduce faith in the resurrection of Jesus to the continuation of the cause of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> For some others the resurrection of Jesus is the symbolic interpretation of liberation.<sup>5</sup> There is a discussion

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<sup>1</sup> For a general idea of contemporary discussions about the resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances, see A. AMATO, "La risurrezione di Gesù nella teologia contemporanea", *Salesianum* 43 (1981), 317-332; id., *Gesù il Signore*, Bologna 1999, 548-553; F. G. BRAMBILLA, *Il crocifisso risorto. Risurrezione di Gesù e fede dei discepoli*, Brescia 1998, 30-142, 170-249; hereafter cited as *Il crocifisso risorto*; D. KENDALL, "Catholic Theologians on the Post-Resurrection Appearances", *Priest and People* 1 (1987), 45-50; G. O'COLLINS, *What are they saying about the Resurrection?*, New York 1978, 7-40; id., *Jesus Risen*, 34-98; J. P. GALVIN, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Catholic Systematics", *HeyJ* 20 (1979), 123-145; H.-G. GEYER, "The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A Survey of the Debate in Present Day Theology", in C. F. D. Moule (ed.), *The Significance of Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, Naperville 1968, 105-135; F. KERR, "Recent Catholic Writing on the Resurrection", *NBlackfr* 58 (1977), 453-461; 506-515; R. C. WARE, "The Resurrection of Jesus", *HeyJ* 16 (1975) 22-35, 174-194.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Gerald O'Collins has written substantially about the resurrection of Jesus. As Francis Schüssler Fiorenza observes, "Among leading contemporary Roman Catholic fundamental theologians, no one has written more extensively and more often as G. O' Collins." F. S. FIORENZA, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology", in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall & G. O'Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Oxford, 1997, 217; hereafter cited as "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology". G. O' Collins considers the post-resurrection appearances as the major catalysts for the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Interpreting Jesus*, London 1983, 116. Norman Perrin considers the post-resurrection appearances as the heart of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. According to him, the more we study the post-resurrection appearances, the better we understand their basis. Cf. N. PERRIN, *The Resurrection According to Matthew, Mark and Luke*, Philadelphia 1989, 80-82.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. BULTMANN, "New Testament and Mythology", in H. W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, New York 1961, 38-42; hereafter cited as "New Testament and Mythology".

<sup>4</sup> Cf. W. MARXSEN, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, London 1970, 128, 183.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. F. SCUKA, "Resurrection: Critical Reflections on a Doctrine in Search of a Meaning", *Modern Theology* 6 (1989), 90.

among theologians as to whether the resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact or not.<sup>6</sup> According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, the resurrection of Jesus should be considered as a historical event in the sense that it actually happened at a definite time in the past.<sup>7</sup> Raymond E. Brown is of the opinion that the resurrection of Jesus is an eschatological event and at the same time it is something that happened in history.<sup>8</sup> According to Gerhard Lohfink, the historical method cannot prove the resurrection of Jesus. We can subject to historical questioning only the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>9</sup>

Since the Enlightenment there were several attempts to explain the origin of resurrection faith in psychological and historical terms without accepting that the post-resurrection appearances actually took place. The important writers are Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874). According to Reimarus, the disciples contradict each other in the principal points of their assertion of the resurrection of Jesus. There are many contradictions in the gospel accounts about the time, place, manner and circumstances of the appearances and the persons encountered. The disciples' proof of the resurrection from the Old Testament writings distorts the scriptural passages. Therefore he concludes that it was the disciples who stole the body of Jesus from the tomb at night, and buried it in another

place and invented the post-resurrection appearances and the message of the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

### *1. A Psychological Explanation of the Post-Resurrection Appearances*

D. F. Strauss explained the resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances in a psychological manner. He also said that the accounts of the New Testament about the resurrection of Jesus contradict each other and therefore we cannot accept them as true. He notes that during Jesus' earthly life on earth, he had impressed the disciples with the belief that he was the Messiah. But the death of Jesus annihilated this belief for a moment. When this shock was past, the earlier impression began to revive itself. There arose in them a psychological necessity to solve the contradiction between the death of Jesus and the idea of the Messiah in the Old Testament. The disciples turned to the Jewish scriptures to find the intimations of a suffering and dying Messiah. They succeeded in interpreting certain passages in Isaiah and Psalms as referring to the man of God afflicted and bowed down to death. They proclaimed that Jesus is the crucified Messiah who has truly entered into the highest form of blessed existence and that his body did not remain in the grave. The post-resurrection appearances of the risen Jesus are the result of disciples' strong inner conviction that Jesus is risen. Paul received from the disciples the idea of the resurrection of Jesus

<sup>6</sup> Cf. H. FRIES, *Revelation*, London 1970, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus: God and Man*, London 1970, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. E. BROWN, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus*, London 1973, 126.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. G. LOHFINK, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Historical Criticism", TD 17 (1969), 110-114.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. S. REIMARUS, *Reimarus: Fragments*, C. H. Talbert, (ed.), Philadelphia 1970, 153-212.



and the different appearances of the risen Jesus and vivified this idea in his imagination until it became a part of his own experience. Thus Strauss interprets the post-resurrection appearances as the internal convictions of the disciples and of Paul.<sup>11</sup>

According to Strauss, the gospel accounts contradict each other while describing the essence and the dealings of the risen Jesus. Strauss opposes the view that it is difficult to explain the beginning of Christianity and the change in the behaviour of the disciples if Jesus is not risen. He argues that to explain the change in the behaviour of the disciples, it is enough that the disciples had a strong inner conviction that Jesus is risen. Here he brings his psychological explanation. Strauss uses Paul as a model for his psychological explanation. According to him, the conversion experience of Paul is only an interior event that can be understood as a psychologically excited reality. The post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord to the other disciples are also to be understood in a similar way.<sup>12</sup>

Strauss built up his psychological explanation on the basis of some hypotheses for which we cannot find the basis in the New Testament. The New Testament does not speak of the long process of maturation of Paul, but of an unexpected and sudden change, caused by God. It cannot be admitted that

the disciples also had a similar internal experience as that of Paul. The word used in the New Testament is *ᾤφθη*, which does not indicate only an internal process. Moreover, there exists no incipient process before Good Friday that could be brought to the internal reflection and research in the scripture that led the disciples to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. As the New Testament clearly depicts, the disciples were desperate after Jesus' cursed death on the cross. It was the encounter with the risen Jesus that led them to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The argument of Strauss that Paul and Peter were the first to believe in the resurrection is wrong, since the New Testament testifies that Paul himself speaks of his coming to faith in the risen Lord only after the Damascus experience. According to Strauss, the post-resurrection appearances are the products of the faith of the disciples and of an excited mind. But the New Testament clearly indicates that the enthusiasm of the disciples was only after the post-resurrection appearances and not vice versa. Likewise, the New Testament texts do not emphasise the ecstatic elements.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Demythologisation of the Easter Faith

For Rudolf Bultmann resurrection is a mythical event. He writes about resurrection as a part of the discussion on the cross and

<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. F. STRAUSS, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*, Tübingen 1835\1836; English Translation *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, Philadelphia 1972, 718-744.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Cf. H. KESSLER, *Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten. Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi in biblischer, fundamentaltheologischer und systematischer Sicht*. Neuausgabe mit ausführlicher Erörterung der aktuellen Fragen, Würzburg 1995; Italian Translation *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo: uno studio biblico, teologico-fondamentale e sistematico*, Brescia 1999, 146-151; hereafter cited as *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 153-156.

kerygma. He does not consider resurrection as an event of past history. Faith in the resurrection is the same thing as faith in the saving efficacy of the cross. Christ meets us today in the preaching. The faith of Easter is faith in the word of preaching and it is wrong to ask how this preaching arose historically. The resurrection of Jesus is not an event of past history. Very often the resurrection of Jesus is presented in the New Testament as a miraculous proof. Both the accounts of the empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances insist on the physical reality of the risen body of the Lord. Paul is trying to prove the miracle of the resurrection by referring to a number of eyewitnesses (1Cor 15.3-8). We cannot establish the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus by citing many witnesses. The resurrection of Jesus could not be considered as a miraculous proof to believe in Christ. Resurrection itself is an article of faith and we cannot establish one article of faith by invoking another. It is more than the resuscitation of a corpse. It is the eschatological event. Therefore, it cannot be a miraculous proof.<sup>14</sup>

Bultmann is not concerned with explaining the fact of the resurrection, but with understanding the phenomenon of faith in the resurrection in its significance "for me". According to him, faith in the resurrection is nothing other than the faith in the cross as an act of salvation. Easter faith is faith in the Church as bearer of the kerygma. It is the faith that Jesus Christ present in the kerygma. The

position of Bultmann has many ambiguities. Bultmann gives the impression that Easter is something that happens not to Jesus, but to the disciples. If the Easter faith is in Christ as presented in the kerygma of the Church, then Christology is absorbed into ecclesiology. Bultmann's theology of resurrection contradicts scripture, particularly the important evidence in the First Epistle to the Corinthians chapter 15.<sup>15</sup>

According to Bultmann, the resurrection of Jesus is not an objective fact. The discourse on the resurrection is above all mythological in nature because it presents the action of God as otherworldly. To understand the real intention of this discourse on the resurrection of Jesus, we have to demythologise it and interpret it as the expression of the importance of the cross. Faith in the resurrection is nothing other than faith in the cross as an event of salvation. The crucified Christ is risen and he encounters us in the proclaimed word. The origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus is obscured by legends in the tradition and it has no substantial importance. The Easter event for Bultmann is not an external phenomenon, but an internal phenomenon. Bultmann does not deal with the question of the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Bultmann discusses the resurrection of Jesus only as a part of the discussion of the cross and kerygma. He avoids the theological question of the peculiarity of the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>16</sup> The resurrection of Jesus is the object and content of faith. But it is not a

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. BULTMANN, "New Testament and Mythology", 38-42.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 132-133.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 157-161.



product of faith. Jesus is not risen in the faith and proclamation of the Church. Jesus transcends the faith and the preaching of the Church. He existed before the Church existed and he is the Lord and the basis of the faith of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. The Post-Resurrection Appearances as Visions

Hans Grass maintains that the post-resurrection appearances are objective visions. According to him, the post-resurrection appearances are not subjective visions, but objective because it is God who takes the initiative in the post-resurrection appearances and not the witnesses.<sup>18</sup> Grass begins with the gospel accounts. According to him, much of the gospel accounts are legendary. However, Grass thinks that the facts that the risen Lord appeared to the disciples and that the Easter faith arose from the post-resurrection appearances can be derived from the gospel accounts. Grass claims that the Pauline presentation of the post-resurrection appearances is more original than the gospel accounts. He admits all the post-resurrection appearances mentioned by Paul to be true. The post-resurrection appearances are not ecstatic experiences. They are visionary in character and have the divine authority. Grass is sceptical about the empty tomb. According to him, what happens in the resurrection of Jesus is not the transformation of the physical body,

but the replacement by a glorious body. He argues that the risen Lord appeared with a body of glory or a spiritual body.<sup>19</sup>

Emanuel Hirsch had proposed a similar theory. He argued that the disciples were prone to visions and that the different post-resurrection appearances can be explained as a kind of chain reaction resulting from the first appearance to Peter.<sup>20</sup> This argument of mental chain reaction cannot be maintained because the different post-resurrection appearances did not follow one another so quickly. At least three stages that are temporally separated from one another can be noted in the sequence of the post-resurrection appearances. First, the appearance to Peter, which probably took place soon after his return to Galilee; second, the appearance to James who joined the group of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem only later; and third, the appearance to Paul, three years after Jesus' earthly life on the road to Damascus. The appearances to the Twelve, to all the apostles and to the five hundred brethren can be located in between, since there is no specific basis for fixing their time.<sup>21</sup>

W. Marxsen depicted the resurrection of Jesus as the continuation of the cause of Jesus. He said that after the death of Jesus, there might have happened something, which the disciples spoke of as seeing Jesus. This enabled them to preach the cause of Jesus. But the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, "Problemi sulla risurrezione di Gesù", in *Dibattito sulla risurrezione di Gesù*, 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. H. GRASS, *Ostergeschehen und Osterberichte*, 233-249.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. L. COENEN & C. BROWN, "Resurrection", in C. Brown (ed.), *NIDNTT*, Vol. 3, Exeter 1975, 282-284.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. E. HIRSCH, *Die Auferstehungsgeschichten und der christliche Glaube*, 38-45.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus: God and Man*, 96-97.

affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus is only a later interpretation. For Marxsen, resurrection means that Jesus calls us to faith.<sup>22</sup> Marxsen presented his views also in his later work. He said that the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus is the miracle of faith. The discourse on the resurrection of Jesus is only a later conclusion based on the faith of the disciples. Resurrection of Jesus means that Jesus, who had called the disciples to faith during his ministry, continues to call us today and that the cause of Jesus continues.<sup>23</sup> Marxsen said that it was Peter who came first to believe in the resurrection and that the faith of Peter had the function of constituting the community. "The faith of the twelve did not take its origin from the appearance of Jesus to them personally, but originated solely in the appearance to Peter."<sup>24</sup> For Marxsen it is not important how Peter came to this faith. As he says, "The way in which Peter's faith was sparked off after Good Friday is unimportant. One must not say that everything would be in doubt if one could not know and say exactly how faith was born in Peter."<sup>25</sup>

According to W. Marxsen, the resurrection of Jesus cannot be described as a

historical event. The statement "Jesus is risen" is not a historical statement, but an interpretation of what was seen. For Marxsen, Easter is not the central fact of Christian faith, but only the precondition for Jesus' work to continue. The resurrection means that Jesus' work continues. Marxsen's concept of occurrence (*Widerfahrnis*) is misleading. An occurrence is not an event that can be interpreted in one way or another. It has a meaning. The experience and its expression in language can never be fundamentally separated. Kasper says that the accounts of the post-resurrection appearances in the New Testament are not merely the legitimising formulas so that the work of Jesus can be continued. The New Testament always speaks of a quite definite sight, the sight of the risen Jesus. The New Testament texts express the experience of a new reality and therefore possess a substance of their own.<sup>26</sup> Marxsen speaks of an occurrence of the vision. He cites Gal 1.15-16 and 1Cor 9.1 in support of his view and argued that it was a vision of Jesus as the Lord. He maintains that we have to start not with the post-resurrection appearances, but from an occurrence of the vision. Therefore,

<sup>22</sup> Cf. W. MARXSEN, "The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical and Theological Problem", in *The Significance of Message of the Resurrection for Faith in Jesus Christ*, C. F. D. Moule (ed.), Naperville 1968, 15-50.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. W. MARXSEN, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 112-129, 183. For the critical evaluations of the interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus by Marxsen see, G. O'COLLINS, *What are they saying about the Resurrection?*, 106-115; id., *Jesus Risen*, 62-65; W. J. LUNNY, *The Sociology of the Resurrection*, London 1989, 30-34; K. L. MCKAY, "Some Linguistic Points in Marxsen's Resurrection Theory", *The Expository Times* 84 (1973), 330-332; R. SCHNACKENBURG, "On the Expression Jesus is Risen From the Dead", *TD* 18 (1970), 36-42; N. M. WATSON, "Willi Marxsen's Approach to Christology", *The Expository Times* 97 (1985), 36-42. For a contrasting assessment of the interpretations of the resurrection of Jesus by Marxsen and Bultmann, see G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Risen*, 65-66.

<sup>24</sup> W. MARXSEN, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 93.

<sup>25</sup> W. MARXSEN, *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*, 127.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 133-134.



according to Marxsen, the resurrection of Jesus is an interpretation of the occurrence of the vision. Kasper notes that there are hermeneutical, historical and exegetical objections to the thesis of Marxsen. Gal 1.15-16 is concerned not with a vision, but with a revelation of the risen Lord. Though 1Cor 9.1 deals with a vision of Jesus as the Lord, it is in connection with the formula *egerthe* or *egerthai* (he was raised from the dead).<sup>27</sup>

Marxsen argues that after the death of Jesus, there might have happened something, which the disciples spoke of as seeing Jesus. This enables them to preach the cause of Jesus. The fact of seeing is the last historical data that can be established, while the affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus is only a later interpretation. It is not the resurrection that is the decisive factor, but Jesus. Kessler notes that in a later work Marxsen argued that it was Peter who first came to believe in the resurrection. The faith of Peter had the function of constituting the community. This seeing is not a historically recognizable thing. The miracle of the resurrection of Jesus is a miracle of faith. The discourse on the resurrection of Jesus is only a later conclusion based on the faith of the disciples. The resurrection of Jesus means that the crucified Jesus calls us to faith and that the cause of Jesus continues today.<sup>28</sup>

Marxsen used the term occurrence (*Widerfahrnis*) in a superficial manner that lacks the aspect of personal encounter. Marxsen's

interpretation of the relationship between seeing the risen Lord and resurrection is not justifiable. According to the New Testament, the disciples did not see something indefinite, but the crucified Jesus as living. The disciples had a real experience with a determined content. This experience and the verbal interpretation are not separable. The interpretation that Jesus is risen, is primarily determined by the content of this experience. The authentic reality of the resurrection according to Marxsen is the event of faith. Marxsen does not give an adequate answer for the origin of faith in the resurrection. Though Marxsen speaks of the post-resurrection appearances, he holds that they are expressed in the prophetic language of their vocation. The difference between Old Testament prophetic language and New Testament language of the post-resurrection appearances is vague in the presentation of Marxsen.<sup>29</sup>

Karl Rahner speaks of three kinds of vision: corporeal, imaginative and purely spiritual. According to Rahner, most of the visions are imaginative. But he does not deny the possibility of corporeal visions. Even the genuine visions are strongly influenced by the subjective qualities of the visionary. Rahner considers the visions of Jesus to saints and mystics as imaginative visions rather than as corporeal visions. The bodies required for corporeal visions such as the body of Jesus are not present on earth. Rahner refers to the opinion of St. Teresa of Avila that the glorified

<sup>27</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 137-138.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 161-164.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 162-165.

humanity of Christ has never shown itself on earth since his appearance to Paul shortly after his Ascension. According to Rahner, if there are no conclusive proofs, most of the visions reported in religious experience should be regarded as imaginative ones. An imaginative vision can be an authentic one if God produces it. Rahner considers a vision to be produced by God if it is accompanied by some objective miracle.<sup>30</sup>

There exist authentic imaginative visions i.e., visions really provoked by God. In these visions, as noted by the great mystics, the divine influence is on the level of the interior sensible sphere. It is the influence of the Spirit of God on the heart of the person. This influence has a psychogenic effect on the interior sensibility of the person, and that leads to imaginations with the character of a projection. The sensible and imaginative elements are not the true and proper nucleus of these experiences. They merely depend on the divine influence in the supernatural life. Kessler admits that the content of the post-resurrection appearances i.e., the manifestation of the crucified Jesus as living in virtue of the power of God, is also sensibly given. But this historical and sensible experience is not a product of the disciples. The post-resurrection appearances cannot be considered as an imaginative echo of the life of the disciples with God or with Jesus. Moreover,

the post-resurrection appearances are not understood as visions in the New Testament. We do not find proper ecstatic and visionary elements in the New Testament texts about the post-resurrection appearances. The seeing in the post-resurrection appearances is clearly of its own type and it cannot be compared with any other seeing.<sup>31</sup>

According to Kasper the post-resurrection appearances cannot be considered as visions. He observes that the New Testament does not speak of the post-resurrection appearances as apparitions (*Gesichten*) or daydreams or dreams at night (*von Tag oder Nachträumen*) or ecstatic visions (*ekstatischen Verzückungen*). Therefore, the post-resurrection appearances cannot be classified as subjective visions (*subjektiven Visionen*). So also, they cannot be understood as objective visions (*objektiven Visionen*), as H. Grass had spoken about them.<sup>32</sup>

As Hans Kessler observes: "There is no trace either in the early statements about the appearances or in the stories of the appearances in the gospels of a visionary seeing, of elements produced by enthusiasm along the lines of a purely psychological concept of vision. There are no indications whatsoever that early Christianity derived Easter faith from inner spiritual events. And the seriousness of the religious claim of the

<sup>30</sup> Cf. K. RAHNER, *Visions and Prophecies*, 31-75.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 204-210.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 138.



texts simply collapses with a purely psychological explanation.”<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. The Resurrection of Jesus in the Reflections of the Disciples

Rudolf Pesch, a German Catholic exegete, for a time held the resurrection faith to be a later interpretation of the eschatological claim of Jesus. Instead of basing the origin of resurrection faith in the post-resurrection appearances, Pesch said that the origin of resurrection faith could be traced to the pre-Easter Jesus. According to him, the disciples did not lose their faith in Jesus even after Good Friday. This lasting faith of the disciples and that of Peter in particular, is the cause of the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples were able to interpret the death of Jesus as the destiny of the eschatological-

messianic prophet and of the “Son of Man”. Through a Christological reflection on the pre-Easter promises of Jesus they were in a position to proclaim in a new manner the legitimacy of the messianic claim of Jesus and his unique eschatological relevance through his resurrection. Thus the affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus is understood as the interpretation of the definitive eschatological importance of Jesus in the face of his death. Pesch also argued that this faith in the resurrection of Jesus was the presupposition of the pre-Pauline affirmation about the appearances. Therefore the post-resurrection appearances do not give us information on the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus, but an ecclesiological affirmation in which the authority of Peter and of others is expressed.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> “In den frühen Erscheinungsaussagen und in den Erscheinungserzählungen der Evangelien ist von einem visionären Sehen, von enthusiastisch-produktiven Elementen im Sinne eines rein psychologischen Visionsbegriffes gerade nichts zu finden. Es gibt keinerlei Hinweise darauf, dass die frühe Christenheit den Osterglauben auf innere, seelische Vorgänge zurückgeführt hätte. Und der Ernst, der religiöse Anspruch der Texte wird bei einer rein psychologischen Erklärung ohnehin verfehlt.” H. KESSLER, *Sucht den Lebenden nicht bei den Toten*, 221.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. R. PESCH, “Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu”, TQ 153 (1973), 201-228. For Küng’s criticism of Pesch, see H. KÜNG, “Zur Entstehung des Auferstehungsglaubens: Versuch einer systematischen Klärung”, TQ 154 (1974), 103-117; ET “The Origin of Resurrection Belief”, TD 23 (1975), 136-142. The third issue of *Theologische Quartalschrift* 153 (1973) was dedicated to the discussion of this argument of Rudolf Pesch regarding the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Cf. W. KASPER, “Der Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu vor dem Forum historischer Kritik”, TQ 153 (1973), 229-241; hereafter cited as “Der Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu”; K. H. SCHELKLE, “Schöpfung des Glaubens?”, TQ 153 (1973), 242-243; P. STUHLMACHER, “Kritischer müssten mir die Historisch-Kritisch sein”, TQ 153 (1973), 244-251; M. HENGEL, M., “Ist der Osterglaube noch zu retten?”, TQ 153 (1973), 252-269. For Pesch’s response to his critics, see R. PESCH, “Stellungnahme zu den Diskussionsbeiträgen”, TQ 153 (1973), 270-283. See also J. NÜTZEL, “Zum Schicksal des eschatologischen Propheten”, *Biblische Zeitschrift* 20 (1976), 59-94; H. W. BARTSCH, “Der Ursprung des Osterglaubens”, TZ 31 (1975), 16-31; A. KOLPING, “Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu”, MThZ 26 (1975), 56-69; J. KREMER, “Entstehung und Inhalt des Osterglaubens: Zur neuesten Diskussion”, TRv 72 (1976), 1-14; A. SCHMIED, “Auferstehungsglaube ohne Ostererscheinungen?”, TGew 17 (1974), 46-51; Id., “Auferstehungsglaube heute und die ursprüngliche Ostererfahrung”, TGew 20 (1977), 43-50; A. STOCK, “Wirbel um die Auferstehung”, *Diakonia* 6 (1975), 187-192. For an assessment of this position of Pesch and a brief survey of the responses of other theologians to Pesch’s position, see J. P. GALVIN, “Resurrection as Theologia crucis Jesu: The Foundational Christology of Rudolf Pesch”, TS 38 (1977) 513-525.

R. Pesch finds the basis of the resurrection faith in the eschatological claim of Jesus, which was interpreted after his death using the Neo-Judaic concepts of ecstasy and resurrection. According to Pesch, the resurrection belief is the expression of the permanent validity of Jesus' eschatological claim.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the earthly Jesus, the risen Jesus has his own meaning and content. Pesch says that the identity and continuity between the earthly Jesus and the exalted Jesus must be held. But this does not mean that the resurrection of Jesus is only a symbol or expression of the permanent validity of the earthly Jesus. Resurrection is reality with its own content (*Inhaltlichkeit*). It is the new life of the crucified Jesus in the power or reign (*Herrschaft*) of God.<sup>36</sup>

According to Pesch, the foundation of the faith in the resurrection of Jesus is not found in the post-resurrection appearances, but in Jesus himself. Pesch argues that the post-resurrection appearances are legitimising formulas and the resurrection belief is the expression of the permanent validity of Jesus' eschatological claim. According to Kasper, we cannot conclude that the disciples were able to overcome the scandal of the death of Jesus merely from an understanding by deduction. The argument of Pesch is not sufficient to explain the origin of resurrection faith.<sup>37</sup>

According to Pesch, the disciples did not lose their faith in Jesus even after the Good

Friday is very clear from Lk 22.31 at least in the case of Peter. This lasting faith of the disciples and of Peter in particular is the cause of the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples are able to interpret the death of Jesus as the destiny of the eschatological-messianic prophet and of the "Son of Man". They proclaim in a new manner the legitimacy of the messianic claim of Jesus and its unique eschatological relevance through the message: Jesus is risen. It is this faith in the resurrection of Jesus that is the presupposition of the pre-Pauline affirmation about the appearances. The pre-Pauline affirmation is not about the origin of faith in the resurrection, but an ecclesiological affirmation. *Ōphthē* is a legitimising formula, the literary form in which the authority of Peter and of others is expressed.<sup>38</sup>

The claim of Pesch that the disciples continued their faith in Jesus is contrary to the New Testament evidence. The crucifixion of Jesus as cursed by God had destroyed the faith of the disciples in Jesus. The argument that the disciples' pre-existing faith in the Messianism of Jesus paved the way for the faith in the resurrection of Jesus is not valid, because the Jews could not think that the Messiah would be the crucified. Pesch's argument that the disciples had understood the salvific value and meaning of Jesus' death from the earthly Jesus is not documented. The interpretation of the death of Jesus as an

<sup>35</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 134.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, "Der Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu", 237.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Jesus the Christ*, 134.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 174-177.



expiatory death recurs in the tradition of the Last Supper and it is not dealt with elsewhere in the synoptic tradition. The meaning of the death of Jesus remains very difficult for the disciples before Easter. The affirmation of Pesch that the disciples were prepared for the death of Jesus at least by the end of the evening of Maundy Thursday, on the basis of the pre-existence of Jesus and faith in the resurrection, is an exaggerated notion. Prior ideas of the resurrection of martyrs and of such Eschatological-Messianic figures as Enoch or Elijah are presupposed only in a certain period and not during the period of Jesus. These ideas are never used in the New Testament to understand the destiny of Jesus or his resurrection. Kessler argues that the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus is not deducible from a self-knowledge of Jesus as the "Son of Man". Though there was a connection between the "Son of Man" and sitting on the throne in the Hebrew tradition, there is no connection between the "Son of Man" and suffering nor between the "Son of Man" and resurrection. The interpretation of Lk 12.8 by Pesch in the sense of the self-identification of Jesus is an exaggerated one. This text does not actually speak about the relationship between Jesus and the "Son of Man", but about the relationship between the hearers and Jesus and between the hearers and the "Son of Man" coming in the judgement.<sup>39</sup>

Pesch changed his view regarding the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>40</sup> Pesch later acknowledged that faith in the resurrection of Jesus was from the appearances of the risen Lord. Pesch now distinguishes between evidence *de jure* before the Easter and evidence *de facto* after Easter. The resurrection of Jesus is a fact already known to the disciples as the promise of the fidelity of God with the life and death of Jesus. Faced with the death of Jesus they continue to believe the claim advocated by Jesus. The appearances of the risen Lord are the beginning of the evidence *de facto*. According to Kessler, the proposal of Pesch sounds like the conversion of the disciples between Good Friday and Easter effected by God. The conception of the appearances on the part of Pesch remains ambivalent.<sup>41</sup> Pesch fails to consider the unique and unrepeatable nature of the post-resurrection appearances. Pesch places the origin of faith in the resurrection either in the period prior to Easter i.e., in the earthly Jesus, or in the period after Easter i.e., in the early ecclesial faith experiences. But the New Testament affirms above all the new action of God in the encounters of the risen Lord.<sup>42</sup>

As G. O' Collins observes, though it is something positive that Pesch now accepts the reality of the post-resurrection appearances, his argument that Jesus appeared as the "Son of Man" is not convincing. The passion

<sup>39</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 182-187.

<sup>40</sup> R. PESCH, "Das leere Grab und der Glaube an Jesu Auferstehung", *IkaZ* 11(1982), 6-20; id., "Zur Entstehung des Glaubens an die Auferstehung Jesu. Ein neuer Versuch", *FZPhTh* 30 (1983), 73-98.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 177-181.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 188-190.

predictions in Mark (8.31; 9.31; 10.33-34) do not speak of the appearances of the "Son of Man". The Transfiguration account (Mk 9.2-13) also does not speak of the visions of the "Son of Man". Likewise, Pesch ignores the early designation of Jesus as Christ or Lord and the early traditions of the post-resurrection appearances (Acts 2.32; 1Cor 9.1; 15.3-8).<sup>43</sup>

### 5. The Post-Resurrection Appearances as Conversion Experiences

Schillebeeckx says that disciples underwent a conversion process between the two historical events of Jesus' death and the apostles' preaching of the resurrection of Jesus. This process of conversion involved the experience of having received forgiveness from Jesus and an experience of grace and mercy. Though the death of Jesus caused in the disciples a state of panic, they did not undergo a total lapse of faith. Easter experience means the recognition and acknowledgement of Jesus in the life of disciples. The seeing in the post-resurrection appearances is a recollective and new seeing of Jesus in faith. Peter was the first one to undergo this conversion experience and it was he who took the initiative to gather the other disciples. The conversion experience is presented in the form of an appearance vision in the gospels. This conversion experience itself was a gracious act of Christ. It was a revelation within an experience. The stories of the post-

resurrection appearances are verbal embodiments of this experience. Schillebeeckx interprets Paul's Damascus experience as a conversion vision. Even the pre-Pauline creedal formula is the result of theological reflection and not the articulation of the original Easter experience. The post-resurrection appearances already presuppose Easter faith.<sup>44</sup>

Schillebeeckx was methodologically wrong to use the stories in the Acts to interpret the post-resurrection appearances. They are not the primary material to interpret Paul's Easter experience. They are partly the products of the theology of Luke and he has downgraded Paul's Easter experience to the level of conversion/call experience. Moreover, the experience of forgiveness and conversion are the effects of the resurrection of Jesus and not the very event of resurrection itself. Resurrection is primarily what God did with Jesus and what God did with disciples was only secondary. The post-resurrection appearances are not the result of later reflection of the experiences of conversion and forgiveness.<sup>45</sup>

Schillebeeckx later modified his view on the post-resurrection appearances. He admitted the link between the resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances. He wrote: "Of course the resurrection kerygma precedes the detailed accounts of appearances of Jesus, but in the New

<sup>43</sup> Cf. G. O'COLLINS, *Jesus Today: Christology in an Australian Context*, New York 1986, 41-42. See also, F. G. BRAMBILLA, *Il crocifisso risorto*, 46-70; F. S. FIORENZA, *Foundational Theology*, 18-28; H. GIESEN, "Zu Entstehung und Inhalt des Osterglaubens", *TGegw* 27 (1984), 41-46.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 380-397.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. R. H. FULLER & P. PERKINS, *Who Is This Christ? Gospel Christology and Contemporary Faith*, Philadelphia 1986, 28-40.



Testament there is an undeniable intrinsic connection between Jesus' resurrection and the Christian Easter experience, expressed in the model of appearances.<sup>46</sup>

Though Schillebeeckx conceded the relation between the resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances, he did not consider either the empty tomb or the post-resurrection appearances as the sufficient basis for the faith in the resurrection of Jesus. "Belief in Jesus who is risen and lives with God among us cannot be founded on an empty tomb as such, nor as such on the visual elements which there may have been in appearances of Jesus, but this negation need not of itself necessarily imply that both the tomb and the resurrection visions were not a historical reality".<sup>47</sup>

Walter Kasper criticises Schillebeeckx' one-sided starting point in Christology with the earthly Jesus. If we search for a canon within the New Testament canon, then we will find not the earthly Jesus only, but the unity of the earthly Jesus with the crucified Jesus. Even

the narration of the earthly Jesus is influenced by the experience of the risen Lord in the Spirit. Kasper says that the majority of the exegetes are not in agreement with the suggestions of Schillebeeckx. Kasper wonders how Schillebeeckx is unaware of the criticisms against Rudolf Pesch published in *Theologische Quartalschrift*.<sup>48</sup> The real problem in the Christology of Schillebeeckx is in his understanding of the meaning of the post-resurrection appearances. Schillebeeckx interprets them as the extrapolation of the character of the grace of God in the Church. They express what the Christian community does, its origin, and its legitimation in Jesus Christ. According to Schillebeeckx, there was the faith in the resurrection of Jesus even before the talk of the appearances. The real Easter experience is in the recognition of the totality of the life of Jesus as revelation of God. The post-resurrection appearances express this new seeing of Jesus in faith. They are also expressions of a conversion experience (*Bekehrungserfahrung*) whose origin is in the initiative of God himself.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> E. SCHILLEBEECKX, Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ, New York 1981, 74.

<sup>47</sup> E. SCHILLEBEECKX, Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ, New York 1981, 75.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, "Liberale Christologie", 359. The third issue of *Theologische Quartalschrift* 153 (1973) was dedicated to the discussion of the earlier argument of Rudolf Pesch regarding the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. Schillebeeckx responds to this criticism of Kasper that at that time he was unaware of these articles published in *Theologische Quartalschrift*. Moreover, Schillebeeckx says that Kasper has evaluated his work in the light of the discussion on Rudolf Pesch. Cf. E. SCHILLEBEECKX, Interim Report on the Books Jesus and Christ, 90-97.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, "Liberale Christologie: Zum Jesus-Buch von Edward Schillebeeckx", *Evangelische Kommentare* 9 (1976), 359; hereafter cited as "Liberale Christologie". For the critical evaluations of this position of Schillebeeckx, see A. AMATO, "La risurrezione di Gesù nella teologia contemporanea", 327-328; S. BARLONE, *Le apparizioni del risorto agli undici*, 55-106; F. G. BRAMBILLA, *Il crocifisso risorto*, 30-45; G. O' COLLINS, *Interpreting Jesus*, 120-124; id., *Jesus Risen*, 115-117; J. P. GALVIN, "The Resurrection of Jesus in Catholic Systematics", 134-135.

Schillebeeckx sees faith in the resurrection of Jesus in connection with the forgiveness of sins (Jn 20.22-23; Mt 28.19; Acts 26.18; 1Cor 15.17; Rom 4.25b). Peter is the first one to experience the forgiveness i.e., the experience of the renewed offering of salvation on the part of Jesus. He is the first disciple to be converted to Jesus as it is shown in Lk 22.32. The other disciples discuss among themselves this experience of Peter. The traces of this discussion can be found in the motif of doubt depicted in the Easter accounts (Mt 28.17; Lk 24.11,37-41; Jn 20.9, 25-27). In this process of communication and maturation, the disciples find evidence of faith that the Lord is alive and offers them again forgiveness and salvation. Peter might have recognized Jesus as the Messianic-eschatological prophet and took the initiative to gather again the disciples. The experience of forgiveness together with the renewal of the life of the disciples is the matrix in which the faith in Jesus' resurrection is born. The accounts of the post-resurrection appearances are used to describe the character of the grace of the conversion of the disciples and their experience. They indicate the starting point of the new coming together of the disciples.<sup>50</sup>

For Schillebeeckx the primary element of the Easter experience is the experience of forgiveness and the new offer of salvation. But the only allusion to a conversion of Peter in the New Testament is Lk 22.31-32, and in these verses the faith preserved and the successive conversion of Peter are contrasted.

Moreover, we cannot historically reconstruct the Easter experience only on the basis of this text. The biblical texts cited by Schillebeeckx (Jn 20.22-23; Mt 28.19; Acts 26.18; 1Cor 15.17; Rom 4.25b) do not say that the first disciples went through an experience of forgiveness after Good Friday. These texts say that the risen Lord appeared to the disciples and sent them to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins. The primary meaning of these texts is the self-manifestation and the new presence of the risen Jesus experienced by the disciples. The New Testament says nothing about a long process of maturation of the disciples by which they arrived at a consensus regarding the resurrection of Jesus. The motive of doubt described in the gospels, on which Schillebeeckx bases his argument, does not give us any proof for this; rather they have apologetical motives. For Schillebeeckx there is no substantial difference between the way in which the first witnesses came to faith in the risen Jesus and the way the later Christians came to the Easter faith. The post-resurrection appearances are not later representative models, as proposed by Schillebeeckx. They express the original encounter with the risen Lord by the disciples.<sup>51</sup>

Both Schillebeeckx and Pesch say that the earthly life of Jesus is the basis of belief in the resurrection of Jesus. Both of them assert that belief in the resurrection of Jesus is prior to the appearance traditions. They do not consider either the empty tomb or the post-resurrection appearances as the ground for the

<sup>50</sup> Cf. H. KESSER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 165-169.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 170-173.



origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. They argue that Jesus' death did not lead to a loss of faith in Jesus. Both of them argue that the faith in the resurrection of Jesus is based on identifying Jesus with the eschatological prophet. But Schillebeeckx differs from Pesch in appealing to the post-Easter conversion experience. Unlike Pesch, Schillebeeckx says that though Jesus' earthly life had provided the basis for the identification of Jesus as eschatological prophet, the identification takes place only after the death of Jesus. Pesch argued that the faith in Jesus before death is continued and is further modified after Jesus' death. But Schillebeeckx postulates a conversion experience.<sup>52</sup>

## 6. The Post-Resurrection Appearances as Results of Guilt Complex

According to Lüdemann, Peter's vision shaped all the visions of the other disciples, except that of Paul. Peter's vision of the risen Jesus was a delusion and it could be compared to the situation of mourners, who very often have visions of beloved persons who have died.<sup>53</sup> Lüdemann analysed the behaviour of Saul using the concepts of depth psychology. According to him, the preaching of the Christians had a strong effect on the emotional and unconscious level of Saul. Out of fear of his unconscious strivings, Saul projected them on to the Christians. It was this inner build-up in the person of Saul, which became the basic motivation for his persecution of the

Christians. Saul was unconsciously a Christian even before his conversion. This unconscious Christ complex found release by the Damascus Road experience. Saul experienced liberation from the law and from sin. But this change was not all of a sudden. It was also a result of his reflection on his vision at Damascus. "The Damascus event was a vision of a kind that occurs in the Old Testament, in inter-Testamental Judaism, in numerous parallels from the Hellenistic and Roman environment of the New Testament, and in the New Testament itself."<sup>54</sup> With regard to the appearance to more than 500 brethren, Lüdemann argued that the number 500 is not to be understood as literal, but as an enormous number. The appearance to more than 500 brethren was identical with Pentecost and it could be understood as mass ecstasy. One or more individuals might have given the stimulus for this event. The speech of Peter at Pentecost and the memoirs of Jesus create religious enthusiasm and that is experienced as the presence of the risen Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

Lüdemann argues that the Damascus experience of Paul has all the characteristics of a vision. He says that Paul was a hysteric endowed with ecstasies. The ecstatic visions of 2Cor 12.1-10 have the same experiential form as the vision of the Damascus Road. Though he speaks about it in a much different manner in Phil 3.4-7, Paul has not said the whole truth here. Lüdemann interprets the visions of Peter and of others in terms of

<sup>52</sup> Cf. F. S. FIORENZA, *Foundational Theology*, 21-25.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. G. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, Minneapolis 1994, 96-99.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. G. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, 49-95, at 69.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. G. LÜDEMANN, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology*, 100-108.

depth psychology and as the result of guilt feeling. Just like persons who when mourning some dear deceased person have visions of the deceased, so also Peter and others have a vision of Jesus as an explanation of their sorrow. The first vision of Peter is the starting point of the Easter faith. All the other Easter experiences depend on the experience of Peter and they are not original revelations. In short, all the Easter experiences of the disciples were products of psychological mechanisms.<sup>56</sup>

Lüdemann ignores the fact that Paul himself has distinguished between the Damascus experience (1Cor 15.8) and his visions and revelations (2 Cor 12.1-10). "Seeing the risen Lord" (1 Cor 15.8) is not repeated and the term *horama* is never used in other texts. Lüdemann adopts an autobiographical interpretation of Rom 7.7-25 in order to justify his hypotheses based on depth psychology and to interpret that Paul has not spoken the whole truth in Phil 3.4-7. But almost all the exegetes have abandoned such an autobiographical interpretation of Rom 7.7-25. The identification of the post-resurrection appearances with Pentecost is not convincing, because the account in Acts 2.1-13 lacks all the characteristics of an Easter account. Lüdemann does not say anything about the appearance to James, the brother of the Lord (1Cor 15.7).<sup>57</sup>

Lüdemann does not clearly distinguish between the resurrection and the post-resurrection appearances. According to Lüdemann, the visions of Peter led to an illusory faith in the resurrection of Jesus. But the New Testament speaks of the post-resurrection appearances as well founded in the action of God. The post-resurrection appearances are events in space and time and are therefore in principle verifiable in a historical way. According to Lüdemann, the resurrection of Jesus does not bring anything new. But the New Testament affirms a new creative action of God qualitatively different from the earthly life of Jesus. The first witnesses do not simply proclaim the actions of the earthly Jesus, but the risen Jesus who is the redeemer and the saviour.<sup>58</sup>

G. O' Collins lists some of the doubtful elements in the presentation of Lüdemann: "that the experience of the forgiveness of sins is primary in the earliest Christian Easter faith; that 1Cor 15.6 and Acts 2.1-13 derive from the same collective, ecstatic experience of the Spirit; that Paul's Damascus Road encounter can be closely related to those reported in 2Cor 12.1-10; that Rev 1.9-20 illuminates the original Easter experiences; that the post-Easter encounters were characterised by ecstasy and light; that the first disciples did not know where Jesus was buried and that the empty tomb

<sup>56</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 386-391.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 388-398.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 399-401.



stories are merely conclusions from the resurrection message; and that an appearance to Mary Magdalene is dubious historically.”<sup>59</sup>

## 7. The Post-Resurrection Appearances as Para-Psychological Phenomena

According to Verweyen, the Easter faith was established by the earthly Jesus. He admits the special occurrences after the death of Jesus, which helped the disciples to overcome the scandal of the crucifixion of Jesus. But he argues that the basis for the faith in the resurrection of Jesus is given during Jesus’ lifetime and not by the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>60</sup> Verweyen argues that the basis of Easter faith for Paul is not the post-resurrection appearances from above and none of the evangelists presents the post-

resurrection appearances as the essential basis of Easter faith. Verweyen is not interested in the how of the post-resurrection appearances. According to him, if there is any analogy regarding the post-resurrection appearances, then that would be from parapsychology.<sup>61</sup> Though Verweyen suggested analogy from parapsychology for the post-resurrection appearances, he does not specify and elaborate it. Verweyen’s argument that the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus is to be found in the earthly Jesus, reminds us of the earlier view of R. Pesch.<sup>62</sup>

Verweyen says that the idea of resurrection is false in the sense that it is connected to the eschatological images and the apocalyptic world. It speaks of a life of the

<sup>59</sup> G. O’COLLINS, “Review of *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* by Gerd Lüdemann”, TS 57 (1996), 340. See also, F. G. BRAMBILLA, *Il crocifisso risorto*, 122-142; I. BROER, “Der Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesu und das geschichtliche Verständnis des Glaubens der Neuzeit”, in H. Verweyen (ed.), *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, Freiburg 1995, 47-64; L. OBERLINNER, “Gott (aber) hat ihn auferweckt-Der Anspruch eines frühchristlichen Gottesbekenntnis”, in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, 65-79; K.-H. OHLIG, “Thesen zum Verständnis und zur theologischen Funktion der Auferstehungsbotschaft”, in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, 80-104; H. VERWEYEN, “Auferstehung: ein Wort verstellt die Sache”, in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, 105-144; B. OBERDORFER, “Was sucht ihr den Lebendigen bei den Toten? Überlegungen zur Realität der Auferstehung in Auseinandersetzung mit Gerd Lüdemann”, *Kerygma und Dogma* 46 (2000), 225-240; W. PANNENBERG, “Die Auferstehung Jesu-Historie und Theologie”, ZTK 91 (1994), 318-28; M. RESE, “Exegetische Anmerkungen zu G. Lüdemanns Deutung der Auferstehung Jesu”, in R. Bieringer, V. Koperski & B. Lataire (eds.), *Resurrection in the New Testament: Festschrift J. Lambrecht*, Leuven 2002, 55-72.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. H. VERWEYEN, “Die Ostererscheinungen in fundamentaltheologischer Sicht”, 426-445.

<sup>61</sup> In his own words: “Wenn es hier tatsächlich Analogien gibt-und der Büchermarkt liefert sie seit einigen Jahrzehnten zuhauf-sind diese nicht eher dem Bereich der Parapsychologie als dem der Historie zuzuordnen?” Cf. H. VERWEYEN, “Auferstehung: ein Wort verstellt die Sache”, in *Osterglaube ohne Auferstehung? Diskussion mit Gerd Lüdemann*, 105-144; at 130.

<sup>62</sup> For a critical appraisal of Verweyen’s presentation of the resurrection of Jesus and a comparison with Pesch, see J. P. GALVIN, “The Origin of Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus: Two Recent Perspectives”, TS 49 (1988), 25-44.

dead received by God only after the destruction of this corrupt world. It is the faith of the patriarchs of Israel that contains the hope and trust in the Yahweh even after death. According to Verweyen, God has definitively revealed his whole essence in the human life of Jesus that goes till death. But God has identified Himself with Jesus from the very beginning and that is made known at Easter. The life and death of Jesus can be revealed as the unconditional character of the love of God only in the light of the resurrection. Before the resurrection nobody has spoken of the incarnation and the self-manifestation of God in Jesus.<sup>63</sup>

Verweyen is little interested in the how of the Easter events. For him the decisive fact is that Jesus was recognized as really alive by the disciples. He says that it is possible to explain the origin of the Easter faith only on the basis of the pre-Easter presuppositions and cognitive capacity of the disciples. He avoids any supernatural interference. According to Verweyen, the origin of the resurrection faith could have gone back to the earthly life of Jesus itself, which the disciples had not adequately understood. We can explain the post-resurrection appearances with the help of parapsychology. Kessler points out that Verweyen does not make any research into

the old formulations of the Easter kerygma. He eliminates the language and the texts that do not fit to his system and in which he suspects supernatural elements. He has made a selective use of the New Testament that fits his project. Verweyen does not start with the canonical gospel of Mark, which speaks of the post-resurrection appearances. None of the New Testament authors quoted by Verweyen excludes the post-resurrection appearances.<sup>64</sup>

## Conclusion

From the New Testament we cannot say anything precisely about the nature of the post-resurrection appearances. All the attempts to explain them are subjective and historically conditioned. The New Testament texts do not give any concrete information about the how of the post-resurrection appearances. They are interested in the content of the revelation of Easter that Jesus is risen. The content is the extraordinary and new experience of encounters with Jesus and the self-manifestation of the risen Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus and the reality of the post-resurrection appearances are irreducible to anything else. But it does not mean that we cannot use analogies to understand the resurrection of Jesus and the

<sup>63</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 409-415. For critical evaluations of the interpretations of the resurrection of Jesus by Verweyen, see M. ANTONELLI, "La risurrezione di Gesù nell'itinerario della teologia fondamentale", *ScuolC* 121 (1993), 26-37; F. G. BRAMBILLA, *Il crocifisso risorto*, 86-121; F. S. FIORENZA, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology", 221-223.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. H. KESSLER, *La risurrezione di Gesù Cristo*, 418-421.



post-resurrection appearances. In the New Testament itself various analogies are used to expound the reality of the resurrection of Jesus. But in our use of analogies, we must be able to point out both the similarities and differences. We cannot fully comprehend the reality of the resurrection of Jesus and the post-resurrection appearances by any of the comparisons we make.

The resurrection of Jesus must be seen in connection with other Christological mysteries and within the context of the whole economy of salvation. We have to understand the resurrection of Jesus in the right perspective of salvation. There is a unity in the whole economy of salvation as designed by God. The creation of the world and man, the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, the final resurrection of man, and the eschatological transformation and consummation of the

whole of creation are related and are to be understood in the one salvific plan of God.

A purely historical approach alone cannot lead us to mysteries of faith like the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus is a mystery of faith to be celebrated, meditated on and lived rather than to be exhausted. What we have seen in our study are only glimpses of that mystery. We admit our incapacity to comprehend this unfathomable mystery of faith.

The risen Jesus does not appear to us as he appeared to the first witnesses. But he is present in the Church (Mt 18.20; 28.20), in the proclamation of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments especially of the Eucharist (Lk 24.30-32; Jn 21.12-13). The risen Lord is also present in the poor. He has identified himself with the last, the least and the lost (Mt 25.31-46). "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn 20.29).



# Theology of Revelation and Experience of the Living Word

Alex Pandarakappil

## Introduction

Phenomenology of religions distinguishes religions as prophetic and mystic, in association with their perception of the God-man relationship. Divine revelation in the prophetic religions is of a proclamatory nature. The concept of God in these religions arises often from prophetic teachings. For example, according to Judaism, God has communicated through his prophets; prophets were God's spokesmen, passing along God's message to the people. By contrast, in mystical religions like Hinduism, the divine disclosure is viewed as a manifestation:<sup>1</sup> the Absolute Reality is manifested in different forms, through the cosmos. Here, often the Sacred is experienced in human interiority, without the mediation of prophets. These religions are not overtly prophetic. But one can ask a question, whether there is a major difference between these two categories of religions, because every mystical experience is based primarily on an initiation coming from an already grown religious tradition; its influence could be perhaps latent or anonymous. From this it follows that the above mentioned

classification is rather based on a difference only in degree.

Christianity is often viewed as the religion which articulates perfectly the prophetic and mystical dimensions.<sup>2</sup> The God experience in this religion springs from the proclamation of the Word manifested in history. To understand this originality, one has to examine theologically the manifold aspects of the Christian notion of revealed Word. To perceive its real nature, we have to bear in mind that the Word, manifested once in history, still remains living and accessible to the world. A systematic study of Christian Revelation must analyze therefore the nature of this dialogical relationship between God and the world. It must also be examined why and how Christians consider history as the locus of Revelation and the Bible as inspired by God.

## 1. The Close Relation between the Revelation and the Word

"To reveal" signifies to take off the veil that covers something, the act of making known something or someone. By "revelation" thus we express two things: the

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<sup>1</sup> Claude GEFFRÉ, *De Babel à Pentecôte : Essais de théologie interreligieuse*, Cerf, Paris, 2006, p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Paul RICŒUR, "Manifestation et proclamation", *Le sacré : études et recherches*, Aubier, Paris, 1974, p. 57-76.

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act of revealing and the person or the reality that ceases to be hidden. In Christian theology, Revelation denotes the act by which God becomes known and the identity of God thus revealed. The faith in a God who reveals himself is the foundation of all Christian spiritual and theological process. Even if this faith originates in a human experience, it flows as a gift signifying the reception of an Otherness that man encounters in his life.<sup>3</sup>

Revelation is not only the process of unveiling or revealing events, but also the act of hearing God. Saint Paul relates Revelation to sight and hearing : "I know that such a person-whether in the body or out of the body I do not know ; God knows - was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told" (2 Cor 12, 6 -7). In this way, "reveal" is to manifest and communicate the divine mystery without simplifying its unalterable nature<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.1. Revelation, Manifestation and Communication

The terms revelation and manifestation denote unveiling, but their use in theology asks for a distinctive analysis. All manifestation is an unveiling of the infinite power of the Creator. It also signifies the perception of the effect of the divine force. In addition to it, the logic of manifestation is often marked by

an apocalyptic nature<sup>5</sup>: effectively, the invisible renders itself visible without reducing itself completely to historical dimension.

By revelation, we mean that God manifests himself through historical events .To reveal, for God, is to give access to human beings to a trans-historic realm and to make them enter into the shrine of his presence<sup>6</sup>. But often the historical events of Revelation bear real signs of the power of God that renders himself present. If it is so, revelation does not deny the manifestation of the Sacred. On the contrary, often manifestation presupposes revelation and lies within it.<sup>7</sup> The Judeo-Christian Revelation is very clearly associated with prophetic proclamations, at the same time it never appears without epiphany; it is not alienated from the manifestation of the sacred<sup>8</sup>. The way God manifests himself to man by his Word does not abolish but transmutes the way in which the Sacred manifests to man in the pagan religions.

Revelation implies also the communication of the divine life in which God wants to introduce man. The picture of a God who communicates himself is fundamental in Christian faith. If the believer experiences God, it is because the Divine Mystery is communicated to man. The Christian profession "I believe" is, therefore, the declaration of one who has faith in a God who speaks and manifests himself.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph DORÉ, *La grâce de croire (I) : la Révélation*, Atelier, Paris 2003, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques MARELLO, "Création, Révélation et manifestation" (ed.), S. BRETON, D. DUBARLE, J. MARELLO (ed.), *Manifestation et Révélation*, Beauchesne, Paris, 1976, p. 63-75.

<sup>5</sup> Yves LABBÉ, *La foi et la raison*, Salvator, Paris, 2000, p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques MARELLO, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>8</sup> Yves LABBÉ, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

The idea of unveiling by the Word is the general Christian notion of Revelation. It is the manifestation of the "Being of God" itself. In order to perceive the nature of this Revelation, it is essential to begin from the very notion of "word".

## 1.2. Word: The Anthropological Meaning

The term "word", associated with the idea of speech and language, is at first anthropologic. Speech is the medium by which a human being makes known his thoughts and feelings to himself and others<sup>9</sup>. It is not mere a group of words used according to a set of grammatical rules, but the instrument of communication. It cannot be detached from language; it is the skill that permits one to enter, as subject, in relation with other<sup>10</sup>. Further, it enables men to recognize each other as subjects. Speech constitutes the whole set of signs that make possible the sharing of human experience. It is the outward verbal expression of the subject gifted by the linguistic faculty. Speech thus concerns our specific identity and is much more than verbal formulations, for certain essential declarations are expressed to others in the gesture of silence or in expressive sighs.<sup>11</sup>

It is by communicating that one develops himself. Speech, therefore, has a creative dimension. It is by speech (word) that one builds up oneself as individual; a child affirms his identity by communicating with his

parents. A human existence devoid of verbal communication is unimaginable. When one is short of words and conversation he is not only deprived of human contact but gets away from himself. To say it otherwise, speech is an exemplary gift of oneself to others and a medium for mutual reception.

Martin Heidegger highlights the mysterious aspect of human speech, and qualifies it as the place where a human being discovers himself. He calls it thus the "home of being".<sup>12</sup> To put it in short, speech is a distinctive human sign, the affirmation of the human person, the expression of his being. The Christian faith makes use of this notion of word to symbolize the divine self communication.

## 1.3. Theological Meaning of the "Word"

The expression "Word of God" cannot be taken in the literal sense; it is metaphoric. As it is part of the human phenomenon and of bodily nature speech cannot be attributed literally to God. The American exegete Sandra Schneiders talks of this metaphoric nature of the expression "Word of God" that she compares to another formula: "God sees our thoughts", which cannot be taken literally because God does not have bodily eyes and because human thought is not perceptible.

To apprehend the real meaning of the expression "Word of God", we need thus

<sup>9</sup> Louis-Marie CHAUVET, *Symbole et sacrement*, Cerf, Paris, 1987, p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>12</sup> Cited by Sandra M. SCHNEIDERS, *Le texte de la rencontre*, Cerf, Paris, 1991, p. 65.



an understanding of what metaphor is. A true metaphor is not a simple comparison. It is not a mere literary ornament facilitating the comprehension of a certain notion. To say it otherwise, it is not just a figure of rhetoric but something that brings a new meaning, that leads to an authentic sense. The new meaning is not a mere substitute of the older one. According to S. Schneiders, a metaphor designates a new genre of meaning opening up to a new world of literally indefinable sense; it is something that engages the imagination, the intellect and the affective exploration of the subject, in and by associations that may appear strange, but in reality much clearer than the literal applications.<sup>13</sup>

According to this writer, the expression "Word of God" is part of the basic metaphors of Christian experience that are indispensable and decisive in the immensely rich and complex reality of our personal and communal relation with God<sup>14</sup>. This expression which does not mean literally the speech of God, carries us to another reality beyond human speech (language): the relation of God to man.

The expression "Word of God" is rightly said to be metaphoric, because there is a true analogy between the Word of God and human speech, the Revelation being the true and intimate encounter between God and

Man. In other terms, "Word of God" is not a simple metaphoric attribution of God for a certain human category, but shows the dialogical dimension of the God-man relationship. It is the human experience of the self-offering of God that the Christians designate by this expression. This theological meaning of the "Word of God" is highlighted by the Second Vatican Council which names its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*.

#### 1.4 *Dei Verbum* and the Theological Meaning of the "Word of God"

*Dei Verbum* underscores even more clearly than the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council that God is both the subject and the content of Revelation. At Vatican II, Revelation, according to Henri Bouillard, is « the self manifestation of God in the history of salvation where Christ is the summit »<sup>15</sup>. This conviction emerges from the consciousness of a divine presence among men in the form of grace and salvation. *Dei Verbum* n° 2 explains this by verbs or expressions like "to reveal himself", "to make known", "to address men as his friends", "moves among them", "to invite and receive them into his own company" which throws light on the multifarious nature of the interpersonal relation between God and man, as well as its development in history<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> "L'automanifestation de Dieu dans l'histoire du salut, dont le Christ constitue le sommet" Henri BOUILLARD, « Le concept de révélation de Vatican I à Vatican II », in J. AUDINET, H. BOUILLARD et al. *Révélation de Dieu et langage des hommes*, 1972, p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Dei Verbum* n° 2, Austin FLANNERY, *Vatican Council II : The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*, Saint Paul, Bombay, 1992, p. 663.

Besides, this Constitution apprehends Revelation as the phenomenon of divine human encounter made possible through divine acts and words intrinsically united between them. Revealing acts are explained by words that proclaim their meaning, bringing to light their mysterious contents. *Dei Verbum* evokes this word-act reciprocity and thus affirms the unique nature of Christian Revelation which relies not only on verbal testimony but also on acts of divine manifestation; it is both knowledge and event. The aim of divine act and communication is to make man participate in God's nature<sup>17</sup>. To enter into communion with man, God chooses to manifest himself.

## 2. Where and how God Speaks?

As a simple answer to the question, where and how God speaks, we can say that the divine voice echoes in the universe. God ... "provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities".<sup>18</sup> "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom 1, 20)

### 2.1. Knowledge of God through His Creation

In the Creation narrative (Gen 1, 1-2,4a), the work of God is designated by the verb *bara* (to create as a verb). The creation is the result of the *Verb* of God who manifests

his supreme power and calls everything to existence.<sup>19</sup> The psalmist bears witness to this relation between the creation and the Word of God and proclaims; "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33, 6). The word creation designates the act by which God made everything that exists and the result of this act. By creation we also mean the cosmos, the coordinated whole that constitutes the universe which we experience.<sup>20</sup> The experience of the cosmos helps man to acknowledge himself as created by God. In other words, man comes to the knowledge of God through his knowledge of the world.<sup>21</sup> The invisible God makes himself visible through his creation; thus he is knowable outside the historical Revelation.

Knowing God through his creatures is a favorite theme for the Psalmists. (Ps 8; 19; 29; 104; 148). The testimony of Wis 13, 1-5 is also particularly striking. Saint Paul continues on the same note when he says: "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom 1, 20). He also brings to light the presence of the divine will written on human hearts (Rom 2, 14-16). The law of nature co-exists in the hearts of man with the Law of Moses. God offers man the possibility to experience His will. In short, the creation makes man capable of recognizing not only God's divine power but also His will.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> *Dei Verbum* n° 3, *op.cit.*, p. 664.

<sup>19</sup> Louis ALONSO-SCHOEKEL, *La Parole Inspirée*, Cerf, Paris, 1971, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> Louis BOUYER, *Cosmos: le monde et la gloire de Dieu*, Cerf, Paris, 1982, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 25.



The act of creation discloses the immanence of the transcendent God. Saint Paul's discourse in Athens (Acts 17, 16-34) confirms this reality. The true God did not forget to give evidence by his kind deeds. The greatness of God is thus recognized by the Greeks and the pagans. His sovereignty, kindness, power and wisdom are all unveiled through his creation. But God is also unknown to the Greeks and the pagans, his action being beyond their thought pattern. Unlike the Greek philosophy and religion, God, the creator that Paul presents is a God whose concern remains fixed on the world. "The God who made the world and everything in it", "the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17, 24), manifests not only his existence but also offers himself to those who look for him, "because we are his offspring" (17, 28). Paul's discourse insists on the unique nature of the creation of man obviously oriented towards the accomplishment of a divine plan.

Not desiring to remain in his absolute transcendence, the Creator invites man to be in relation with him. Let us note that the Old Testament uses the idea of speech (word) to describe the action of creation. The creation is in fact, the manifestation of God's eternal love (Ps105). For those who believe in God, the manifestation through the cosmos is not only natural but religious. Contemplating the creation leads to the strengthening of faith; nature thus prepares one to embrace overwhelming faith in God. To say it

differently, faith integrates and fully expresses up the cosmic testimony of revelation.<sup>22</sup> For the faithful, creation is inseparable from the Divine Alliance. This is so because the creative action of God, which is at the same time the creative Verb, encourages the collaboration and the response of man.

According to the Cappadocian Fathers, the contemplation of nature is an essential element in the knowledge of God. This idea is also well noted by Saint Ephrem (306-373) who contemplates the sacramental character of the universe. He sees a universe filled with symbols that bear witness to the presence of the Creator and that invite man to understand the divine reality. The correlation that Ephrem establishes between the grace of creation and that of Incarnation permits him to see nature and the Holy Scripture as two treasures or two fountains of Divine Revelation. Nevertheless, he does not forget the vital role of faith in the appreciation of symbols of divine presence that are offered in the universe; it is the Spirit of God who generates faith and makes possible such a recognition<sup>23</sup>. We find an echo of this patristic reflection on nature and creation in some of the great figures of the medieval theology like Bonaventure (c.1217-1274) and Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464). The cosmos, as evoked by Bonaventure, is the first revelation of God. Because, according to him, animate and inanimate nature is a great book that imparts knowledge about God.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Jacques MARELLO, *op. cit.*, p. 63-75.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian VETHANATH, *Divinization in Saint Ephrem*, Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, 2006, p.19.

<sup>24</sup> Alexandre GANOCZY, *La Trinité créatrice*, Cerf, Paris, 2003, p. 128.

The existence of the universe and its beauty or marvelous order, are by themselves the manifestation of the Creator. At the same time, we cannot say that God manifests himself directly and personally. As He is beyond this world, he does not identify with what is manifested in creation. Through the universe, the creator manifests himself as the Other, wholly different from what is created by Him and perceived by human beings. This manifestation allows man to contemplate the Lord of the universe, to ponder His identity and transcendence. The historical Revelation on the other hand is the manifestation of a God expressing himself in person<sup>25</sup>.

## 2. 2. History: the Locus of Revelation

Man is a historical being, a subject whose existence is defined in history. His relation with others is, therefore, historically situated, despite the fact that his relationships often cross the time dimension. The meeting of man and God could be understood in the light of his relation with others. God meets man in his historical existence. The encounter with God is unique and concerns the personal inner self of every man. It has a community dimension: just as God comes to meet me, he meets others and the entire universe. Precisely God introduces himself in human history so that every existing individual can meet him and hear

his words.<sup>26</sup> The Word of God is thus God in History.

In a very general sense, all religions coexist in history. But we cannot think of biblical Revelation without taking into account a series of events situated in time and in a certain cultural environment. The Bible shows God revealing himself not only by his words but also by historical events in the life of his people. To say it differently, the historicity of biblical Revelation forms part of its very essence. The reflection on the relation between Revelation and history is at the centre of the contemporary Christian theology. Because, as Claude Geffré puts it, “the originality of Judeo Christian Revelation, in its difference with other revelations, emerges from its privileged link to history”<sup>27</sup>

### 2.2.1. The Link between Revelation and History

Illustrating the historical model of the theology of Revelation, Avery Dulles evaluates the position of the contemporary Protestant theologians, like Oscar Cullman and Wolfhart Pannenberg, who bring to light the intimate link between Revelation and history.<sup>28</sup> He observes that, for Cullman, Revelation is clearly situated in the history of salvation; the Bible is the story of events revealing God. For this

<sup>25</sup> Henri de LUBAC, *Dieu se dit dans l'histoire*, Cerf, Paris, 1974, p. 104.

<sup>26</sup> André DARTIGUE, *La Révélation, du sens au salut*, Desclée, Paris, 1985, p. 153.

<sup>27</sup> “L’originalité de la révélation judéo-chrétienne, dans sa différence avec les autres révélations, tient à son rapport privilégié à l’histoire” Claude GEFFRÉ “Esquisse d’une théologie de la Révélation”, P. RICŒUR, E. LEVINAS, E. CORNELIS and C. GEFFRÉ, *La Révélation*, Faculté Universitaires Saint-Louis, Bruxelles, 1984, p. 171-205 (cit. p. 195).

<sup>28</sup> Avery DULLES, *Models of Revelation*, Orbis, New York, 1992, p.27.



author, the fundamental divine experience of Israel is one of salvation in and by history. The interpretation of the events of salvation in the light of faith is vital for Cullman, because the events do not interpret themselves. However, for the historiographer, the events are just stories. The Bible, according to Cullman, is at the same time the prophetic history of Revelation and the prophetic revelation of history.<sup>29</sup>

Dulles observes that among Catholics, Jean Daniélou, develops a theology of Revelation by joining this view of salvation history and the typological exegesis of the Greek Fathers. Daniélou's theology of salvation history imparts a certain respect to non-Judeo-Christian "revelations". According to him, before revealing his desire of salvation in the history of Israel, God had manifested it, in a general way, through the cosmos and through the human interiority. The alliance between God and Noah (Gen 9) is of a cosmic nature. Besides, the Bible speaks of various pagan saints. Daniélou differentiates the cosmic religion from natural religions, the latter being strictly outside a supernatural order. The cosmic religion denotes an alliance of grace; nevertheless, it is imperfect because God does not reveal himself through the cosmos. According to Daniélou, it is only in the Judeo-Christian Revelation that God takes the initiative to manifest himself to man.<sup>30</sup>

According to W. Pannenberg, we cannot speak of Revelation without mentioning universal history. For him, the link between history and the Revelation is narrower than understood by Cullman. For this author, universal history is the place and process of the manifestation of God. As Denis Müller observes, Pannenberg insists on the indirect nature of the Revelation of God in history in general and in the Old Testament in particular. According to this perspective, we cannot reach God directly by means of a theophanies; God unveils himself by the mediation of historical events.<sup>31</sup> He does not manifest himself directly as he is. We read in the Bible that «no one has ever seen God». Still, the mediation of history manifests the being of God. God himself is the subject of this Revelation, he reveals himself in history, of his own initiative. Differing from Cullmann, Pannenberg thinks that the events of Revelation interpret by themselves. The recognition of their revealing character is not preceded by faith; it is the historical Revelation as self-manifestation of God that creates faith.<sup>32</sup>

The close relation that Pannenberg establishes between the universal history and the history of salvation calls for a precise distinction between the one and the other. According to Karl Rahner, Revelation history is co-extensive with universal history. And yet, they are not identical. For it was to the people

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 180.

<sup>31</sup> Denis MÜLLER, *Parole et histoire: dialogue avec W. Pannenberg*, Genève, Labor et Fides, 1983, p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Avery DULLES, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

of Israel that God manifests himself for the first time as unique and living Lord and he communicates his nature to them in a special way.<sup>33</sup> The history of salvation in a strict sense starts with the patriarchs and through Moses and his prophets God reassures his people in the expectation of salvation. This election of Israel and the Alliance that God made with them are not to be viewed as the expression of an exclusive love for a particular race, but indicate a call and a mission for announcing to all nations that God proposes his alliance to humanity. In other terms, the election and the covenant constitutes the paradigm of the personal love that God extends to all. Briefly, the election of Israel by God is the mirror that reflects his universal love, extending to every man. So the Church is called to engage itself in a universal mission. Henceforth, the theological history of Revelation does not bear contempt towards other religions; on the contrary, it seeks to unveil the personal act of God's love towards everyone.

The prophets of Israel interpret and proclaim the history of Israel as the mediation of the divine will. This initial interpretation is continued in the life of Israel by a process of memorization; every new historical event encourages this people to reinterpret their faith in the light of the initial interpretation made by the prophets.<sup>34</sup>

The prophetic proclamation brings God and man into communication. Yet, does it express fully the self communication of a personal God by his own words? Prophets bear witness to a God who revealed himself to our forefathers in a clear and explicit manner, willing to open for them the path of eternal salvation<sup>35</sup>. The prophetic proclamation involves a true and authentic mediation. Yet it is not the fullness of the self-communication of God. The Revelation in its plenary sense is not identified with the prophetic proclamation or its written form. The divine self-communication culminates precisely in a concrete historical event: the redemptive Incarnation that gives the history of salvation its specificity.

### 2.2.2. The Fulfillment of the Revelation in a Historical Event

The Incarnation is not just one among the revealing events. It recapitulates and gives meaning to all the events of the history of salvation. So it has a nature eminently concrete and historical. When we have access to the Incarnate Verb, we don't have to look for a further incentive to encounter God. The Old Testament revelation is at the same time the preparation, prophecy and the pre-figuration of this fullness of Revelation<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> K. RAHNER, *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*, Freiburg, 1976, cited by Joseph Ratzinger, *Les principes de la théologie catholique*, Téqui, Paris, 1982, p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> Claude GEFFRÉ, "Esquisse d'une théologie de la Révélation", *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>35</sup> *Dei Verbum* n° 3.

<sup>36</sup> René LATOURELLE, "Révélation", *Catholicisme* (encyclopédie), tome 12, Paris, 1990, p. 1046-1145.



The teachings and events in the life of Christ surpass the nature of a mere proclamation of the divine message. They constitute the self-communication of God. But how can we recognize this manifestation as the Plenitude of Revelation?

### 2.2.3 The Divine Word: the Word of Judgment and Promise

The characteristic by which we can identify the Word of God is that it is at the same time a judgment and a promise. Before Christ or the Gospel, we are confronted with the will of God that reveals to us our own reality.<sup>37</sup> Heb 4.12 explains: "Indeed the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword... It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render un account". The Word of God puts man before the greatness of the divine love manifested in the heart of humanity. It does not lead man to the judgment of condemnation but to the divine brightness that helps discern the good and the evil within us and in the world.

Furthermore, as Jürgen Moltmann points out, the Word of God bears essentially the character of a promise. It declares the

"future" that God prepares for man. It is not just about today, but what the world and the human beings are called upon to become tomorrow.<sup>38</sup> According to Moltmann, God is revealed in the way of promise and in the history of promise, promise being a key word of the religion of expectation of Israel. The faith of Israel, stimulated by promise, is essentially the hope in a God who will definitely be loyal to his words of promise<sup>39</sup>. Similarly, the Gospel is the promise of the kingdom of God, and the Resurrection, the certainty of his Glory and his Kingdom still to come. The promise accomplished in the Resurrection of Christ is in accordance with the "new creation", the eschatological event.<sup>40</sup>

If the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ is definitive and certain, we, however, do not have an exhaustive knowledge of God. This particular event would manifest all its meaning only at the end of history. According to Claude Geffré, we are between an "already" and a "not yet".<sup>41</sup> We must think in an eschatological perspective to seize the universal bearing of the newness brought upon by the Incarnation of the Word. For Geffré it is in the Resurrection as *prolepsis*, in the end of history that we have the key of the universal history.<sup>42</sup> In his opinion, we can thus answer the question: how can the truth revealed in

<sup>37</sup> François BOUSQUET, "Parole de Dieu", *Théo: l'encyclopédie catholique pour tous*, Droguet-Ardant/Fayard, Paris, 1993, p. 597.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *Théologie de l'espérance*, Cerf, Paris, 2000, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>41</sup> Claude GEFFRÉ, "Esquisse d'une théologie de la révélation", *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem.*

Christ, by a particular historical event have a definitive importance for the whole history?

### 2.2.4. The Manifestation of Verb: Revelation in Truth

The Incarnation of the Verb is the historical moment where the gap between, the “hearing” and the “sight” of the divine mystery disappears.<sup>43</sup> In Christ, the dichotomies between divine communication and epiphany do not exist because the incarnated Verb reconciles the proclamation and manifestation of the Word. Saint John expresses this reality: “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory” (Jn 1.14). This key verse of the prologue of Saint John qualifies Incarnation as the event towards which, since the beginning, the Verb was oriented. It was realized in the presence of some witnesses so that they could say “we have seen his glory.” Jesus is the fullness of the divine reality because in him the Word of God unveils its true nature and makes known the divine design for the salvation of the world.

The self-manifestation of God has a universal character.<sup>44</sup> God gives to every individual the intelligence to “hear” and to “see”. So the transmission of the Word is to be actualized constantly and its re-appropriation is to be done for every generation. It is by the Holy Spirit that the divine encounter becomes a reality for every man; the mission and the gift of the Verb are perpetuated through the gift of the Spirit. The

Spirit transmits the content of the act of God’s communication by the manifold testimonies of the Old and New Covenants. The Holy Scripture, in a special manner, bears witness to this reciprocity between the Word and the Spirit and the notion of biblical inspiration helps to reflect on this relation.

### 3. Holy Scripture: Inspired Word

In the third part of the creed, the Holy Spirit is qualified as the one “who spoke through the prophets”. This declaration guides us to the mysterious association between the Spirit and Holy Scripture. The dogma “Holy Scripture is inspired” signifies the irreplaceable status that the Bible occupies in Christian faith and incites us to think of the permanence of the Word of God operated by the action of the Holy Spirit. The matrix of the term “inspiration” is *inspiratus* employed by the Vulgate of Saint Jerome in the formula *divinitus inspirata* in 2 Tim 3, 16 and in 2 Pet 1, 21, the Greek original of which is *theopneustos*.

#### 3.1 Biblical References on Inspiration

Faith in the biblical Inspiration arises from apostolic proclamation. The early Christian community looked upon the Old Testament in the light of their Christ experience. (Lk 24, 25-37; 2 Cor 3, 14-16). Mt 22, 29-32 and Mk 7.10-13 attest that the words of the prophets are the Words of God. The formula “what had been written by Lord through the prophet” ( Mt 1, 22) throws light

<sup>43</sup> André DARTIGUE, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. *Dei Verbum* n° 7.



on this insight. Three New Testament references, 2 Tim 3, 16, 1 Pet 1, 10-12<sup>45</sup> and 2 Pet 1, 20-21<sup>46</sup> also accentuate this perception.

2 Tim 3, 16 affirms: "All scripture is inspired by God". What does the attribute "inspired" assigned to all Scripture signify? Saint Paul puts forth the question of Inspiration when he treats the usefulness of the Scripture: "for teaching for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness". The aim of this Inspiration is that "everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3, 17). The author does not specify what Inspiration with regard to the origin of the Scripture signifies.<sup>47</sup>

2 Pet 1, 20-21 highlights the interpretation of the Scripture as the task of the Church. The author connects Inspiration to divine origin and to Christ event. For him, the prophetic writings of Old Testament and their interpretation are to be understood in the light of the unique Christ experience of the Apostles.

The prophets are inspired by God, but man is undoubtedly the subject of the pronounced words. So what is the nature of this inspiration? There exists an intermediary, the Holy Spirit: His work is to carry to the

human spokesman a word originating from God.<sup>48</sup> How should we comprehend this cooperation between the Spirit of God and the human spirit operating in the redaction of the Sacred Scripture? The Bible itself does not provide an answer to this question. A historical and, theological overview of the Jewish conception of Inspiration provides us further insight.

### 3.2 Historical and Theological Overview of the Concept of Inspiration

Certainty about Inspiration is already present in the Old Testament. Narratives of patriarchal and prophetic calls often depict a God who communicates without intermediary. God speaks to Moses the Mount Sinai; God speaks to him face to face. (Num 12, 8). The table of commandments is considered to be written by God (Ex 31, 18). Besides, God himself asks Moses to write it in a book (Ex 17, 14). According to Leviticus, the Pentateuch is the written expression of the words of YHWH (Lev 1.1). This notion of God's intervention is extended to all prophetic writings and it is attributed to the Spirit of God living in them (Jer 30, 2). In the same way, the literary expressions of divine experience possible through cult and prayers were also often understood as inspired by the Spirit of God. This Jewish conception of

<sup>45</sup> "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory" (1 Pet 1, 10-12).

<sup>46</sup> "First of all you must understand this that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet, 2, 20, 21)

<sup>47</sup> Yves-Marie BLANCHARD, "Toute Écriture est inspirée", (2 Tm 3, 16): les problématiques de la canonisation et de l'inspiration, avec leurs enjeux respectifs", *Recherches de science religieuse*, 93/ 4, 2005, p. 497-515.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

Inspiration was developed by Philo of Alexandria and taken up by many of the Church Fathers.<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2.1 Philo of Alexandria and the Early Christianity

Philo tried to establish the authority of Writings as of coming from God through the prophets. For him:

“The prophet does not bring out anything of his own, but he is the interpreter of another person, who breathes into him all the words and he articulates them at the moment when the divine inspiration takes control of him and when he loses consciousness [...] The Divine Spirit visits and dwells in the citadel of the soul and He resounds and resonates from the interior the whole vocal mechanism of the prophet to express clearly what he predicts» (The Special Laws, IV, 49).<sup>50</sup>

In this perspective, the prophets make no personal utterance for another speaking is in him. Here it is possible to trace out the notion of a strong instrumentation of the prophets and the biblical writers which early Christianity could appropriate, at least in

substance. We notice a remarkable influence of Philo's approach on the divine origin of the Bible in the patristic concept of the scriptural Inspiration.

The patristic approach towards Inspiration is two dimensional: on one hand, it ensures the already established veneration of the Old Testament writings by early Christianity. Besides, it asserts the divine origin of the New Testament.<sup>51</sup> Here the Fathers disagree with Philo. They articulate their conviction about the final divine authority behind the formation of the Scripture by images like plectrum, flute, zither, calamus etc. The Treatise on Christ and Antichrist 2 of St. Hippolytus of Rome, describes the Scripture writers as “furnished with the Spirit, and largely honored by the Word Himself; and just as it is with instruments of music”. John Chrysostom, Augustine and Gregory the Great went further by comparing the Scripture to a letter coming from the Heavenly Father<sup>52</sup>. According to Origen, the charisma of the Holy Spirit ensures each and every detail of the Holy Scripture and therefore we must search through every word of the Bible an inner meaning envisioned by the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> In the writings

<sup>49</sup> Bernard SESBOUÉ, “La canonisation des Écritures et la reconnaissance de leur Inspiration” *Recherche de science religieuse*, tome, 92/1, 2004, p. 13-44.

<sup>50</sup> Translated from French : « Le prophète ne publie absolument rien de son cru, mais il est l'interprète d'un autre personnage, qui lui souffle toutes les paroles qu'il articule au moment même où l'inspiration le saisit et où il perd la conscience de lui-même, du fait que [...] l'Esprit divin visite et habite la citadelle de l'âme et qu'il fait retentir et résonner de l'intérieur toute l'instrumentation vocale pour manifester clairement ce qu'il prédit » (Les lois spécifiques, IV, 49). Cité par André PAUL, *Inspiration et canon des Écritures*, Cahier Évangile 49, Cerf, Paris, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>51</sup> André PAUL, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> Bernard SESBOUÉ, *op. cit.*



of these fathers, we do not find a formal distinction between Revelation and Inspiration. But the Scholastic approach towards Inspiration sets a real difference between Divine Revelation and Inspiration of the Spirit, and thus guarantees the role of human authors.

### 3.2. 2. Saint Thomas Aquinas and Biblical Inspiration

According to the Thomistic perspective, Inspiration is an elevation of the human spirit moved by the Holy Spirit, and Revelation, a perception of divine Reality.<sup>54</sup> For Saint Thomas, the goal of Revelation is to make known a supernatural object and it presupposes Inspiration. It is the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit that prepares prophetic mind to receive divine Mysteries. In other words, in the Thomistic view, Inspiration is not necessarily the Revelation but a divine light that enlightens the writer's judgment on something naturally accessible to the human intelligence<sup>55</sup>. According to the scholastic conception, God is the first efficient cause or primary author (*auctor principalis*), and man, next cause or instrumental author (*auctor instrumentalis*). The *auctor instrumentalis* has the role of a real author, through his personal faculties<sup>56</sup>.

### 3.2. 3. From the Scholastic View to Vatican I

Theological reflections on Biblical Inspiration were later marked by two

concepts: (1). Posterior inspiration and (2). Anterior Inspiration. By posterior inspiration we designate the subsequent approval of the Holy Spirit that transforms a book into Holy Scriptures. The Holy Spirit thus certifies that a book is inspired due to its divine revealing content.<sup>57</sup> Leonard Leys (1554-1623) and Jacques Bonfrre (1573-1642), representatives of this view, have drawn an analogy between biblical and poetic or artistic inspiration. This perspective may reduce Inspiration to a simple divine assistance.

The concept of Anterior Inspiration here is near to the idea of a verbal dictation. God is the main author and man, the passive instrument under the divine impulse. This perspective was mainly voiced by Johannes Baptist Franzelin (1816-1886) who proposed that God communicates the idea to the writer, whose contribution is to express it in appropriate words. This viewpoint is incomplete because it almost eliminates the human element by attributing the substance of the ideas to God, and to man, only the form.

The theories of anterior and posterior inspiration have been rejected by the First Vatican Council. The Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (1870) states:

The books of the Old and New Testaments are to be received as sacred and canonical in their integrity, with all

<sup>54</sup> François MARTIN, *Pour une théologie de la lettre*, Cerf, Paris, 1996, p. 44.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Bernard SESBOUÉ, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

their parts, as they are enumerated in the decree of the Council [Trent] and are contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate. These the Church holds to be sacred and canonical, not because, having been carefully composed by mere human authority, nor merely because they contain revelation with no mixture of error, but because, having been written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God for their author and have been delivered as such to the Church herself.

Vatican I thus opt for an the instrumental causality of the human author. A similar perspective is visible in the encyclical *Providentissimus* of Leo XIII (1893) and that of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943).

The contemporary theology of Inspiration is marked by reflections made in the light of the history of salvation and the historical and social context of the biblical authors. Thus, Karl Rahner addresses the issue by highlighting both the ecclesial aspect of the Scripture and the transcendental nature of Revelation<sup>58</sup>.

### **3.2.4. Prophetic and Communitarian Model of Inspiration: the Thought of Karl Rahner**

Rahner develops a theology of prophetic inspiration based on his notion of self manifestation of divine Mystery. He associates Revelation with the transcendental

subjective pole of the prophet who receives the communication of the divine grace. According to him, the prophet, first recipient of the Revelation, is endowed with the gift of transmitting his experience. He is mandated by God to proclaim the Word through his own charisma and natural ability, and pass it on to others by means of human categories. Prophets, holders of the transcendental experience of God, thus open to men the path of Revelation. Here, the Word of God uses the word of man to manifest itself; the second is the mediation of the first. This principle of prophetic proclamation could be analogically applied to the writing down of the Scripture: God the author of the Scripture makes man capable of communicating His words.<sup>1p x</sup>

Secondly, Rahner proposes a community model of biblical Inspiration where he begins from the reality that the Holy Scripture is not only the Word of God but also the spontaneous manifestation and sincere portrait of the Church's primitive faith. The life of the Church, animated by the Holy Spirit, produces literary testimony. This conception must be extended to the history of Israel which is the anticipation of the New Testament faith. Further, Rahner thinks of a special paternal attitude of God towards the Church, which allows us to understand God as the author of the Holy Scripture. God builds up and unifies the emerging ecclesial communities and makes their faith solid and intelligible. This concept allows us to view the Holy Scriptures as both

<sup>58</sup> This analyze of the theology of Inspiration according to Karl Rahner is based on Bernard SESBOUÉ, *op. cit.*



divine and human. In this perspective, the Holy Writings would not be a mere human interpretation of the Word: it is really the Word of God, whose content is divine Self Revelation.

Rahner interpret the personal charisma of Inspiration in relation to the emergence of the people of God. According to Louis Alonso-Schokel, underlining the ecclesial meaning of inspired authors and books, Rahner, harmonizes perfectly both the community and personal element of biblical inspiration<sup>59</sup>. Moreover, his interpretation takes into account the fact that the Inspiration is not naturally collective, but received by an ecclesial community where different charismas coexist : prophets, doctors and evangelists.<sup>60</sup>

### 3. 2. 5. Book of God and Man: the Perspective of *Dei Verbum*

*Dei Verbum* says:

To compose the sacred books, God chose certain men who, all the while he employed them in this task, made full use of their powers and faculties so that, though he acted in them and by them, it was as true authors that they consigned to writing whatever he wanted written and no more<sup>61</sup>.

Here, the Council's general outlook of Inspiration remains that of instrumentality, but the human writers are considered as authentic writers who use their own resources and

contribute just as normal literary authors. This conciliar concept of the human author is therefore not that of a musical instrument. Besides, it is to be noted that the Council does not qualify God as writer. At the same time, it proclaims that the whole Scripture, the Old as well as the New Testaments, are inspired entirely by the Holy Spirit. If this is so, how to apprehend the correlation between Holy Spirit, man and Scripture? How to interpret the divine and human elements in the Scripture?

The French exegete Paul Beauchamp's commentary to *Dei Verbum* 11 helps to a great extent. The author notes that this text adds an "in them" to the already existing formulation "by them" of the doctrinal texts on Inspiration up to Vatican II. (This second formulation is marked by the classical notion of the instrumentality of the human author). He draws our attention to a note (*in and by man*) which refers to Heb 1,1; 4, 7. Here, the preposition "in", brings to light the intimacy between God and the human writer. The author explains: God speaks to us by Moses, Jeremiah or Paul, but even more "in" Moses, Jeremiah or Paul. This means that Paul is the work of God before the Epistle of Paul is. According to him, the Holy Scripture emerges from the intimacy that unites God and the biblical authors, which is the work of Holy Spirit: the Holy Spirit evokes the interiority of the human authors of the Holy Scripture and consequently produces the sweetness of divine action in them, an action that not only respects

<sup>59</sup> Louis ALONSO-SCHOKEL, *op. cit.* p. 201.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Dei Verbum* n° 11, Austin FLANNERY, Vatican Council II : The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents, Saint Paul, Bombay, 1992, p. 668.

the human authors but confirms their freedom<sup>62</sup>.

Beauchamp continues his reflection on the divine as well as human nature of the Scripture recalling the Council's analogy of Incarnation: "Indeed the words of God, expressed in the words of men are in every way like human language, just as the Word of the eternal Father, when he took on himself the flesh of human weakness, became like man".<sup>63</sup> The incarnated Word is truly God and truly man, not a mix of one and the other; thus the Holy Scripture is truly divine and truly human. According to Beauchamp, to hear the Word of God, we have to pass through the word of man, by a book that does not deliver a direct message. He finds the novelty of *Dei Verbum* in its audacity to make use of this "vulnerability" of the Scripture, word of man as a sign of the abasement of God towards man.<sup>64</sup> In this perspective, the Bible is a "book of testimony" of divine-human encounter.

Accepting the Bible as a book of God and of man allows grasping the indirect nature of divine self communication. God reveals himself in historical events, but he unveils the real sense of these events only through the consciousness of his people. Indeed, the Word that God sends to men is the answer that he expects from them. In other words, the Revelation contains both revealing actions and

the faith experience of the people of God.<sup>65</sup> This invites us to look at the Holy Scripture not only as the deposit of revealed truth, but also as the testimony of the experience of the same. Man can speak of Revelation only after having perceived personally the salvation events as Word of God. How does man obtain this experience of Revelation today?

#### 4. Experience of the Scripture as Living Word

Edward Schillebeeckx emphasizes the relationship between the Word and the human experience. For him, it is this relation that permits us to conceive Revelation as the living Word. There is no dichotomy between faith in the revealed Word and the human experience. Revelation, which is the knowledge or discovery of the existence of God, includes a personal aspect of human experience: a discovery of new human existence. Revelation imparts knowledge about God through a humanly observable event.<sup>66</sup>

Schillebeeckx seeks the possibility of relating Revelation to concrete human experiences. At the same time, he realizes that Revelation is beyond experience and that it does not eliminate its enigmatic nature. So, man needs a true interpretation of the Revelation; each revealing experience must be followed by a true interpretation so that it may become

<sup>62</sup> Paul BEAUCHAMP, *Parler d'Écritures saintes*, Seuil, Paris, 1992, p. 20.

<sup>63</sup> *Dei Verbum* n°13.

<sup>64</sup> Paul BEAUCHAMP, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> Claude GEFFRÉ, "Esquisse d'une théologie de la Révélation", *op. cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *L'histoire des hommes récit de Dieu*, Cerf, Paris, 1992, p. 80.



genuinely personal<sup>67</sup>. What exactly is this interpretation? According to Schillebeeckx, it is the religious tradition of the community where the believer finds himself, and it is this community which interprets the individual experience of Revelation. He formulates it as follows:

New Christian experiences thus happen in and by the encounters between men and women, in the course of history and nature where our lives continue, but always in the light of the faith content emerged from the original experience of Christ event. True and living faith, therefore, originates from "hearing" and finds fulfillment only in a personal experience.<sup>68</sup>

Can we consider listening to the Kerygma, leading to its reception itself, as an individual experience of Revelation? Louis Dupré's criticism of Schillebeeckx's position makes us think in this direction. For Dupré, Schillebeeckx subordinates the interpretation of the believing community's experience to concrete individual experiences. According to him, the Christ experience of the disciples would not have become an experience of divine self manifestation if it was not accompanied by an interpretation. If so, interpretation itself is an experience of the

Revelation. According to Dupré, the apostolic experience and its primary interpretation have thus almost an equal status of Revelation. The personal encounter of the disciples with Jesus, during his public ministry or after the resurrection is unique. For Dupré, this apostolic experience is accessible to subsequent generations, thanks to the canonical corpus of the Bible. In other words, the access to Revelation is impossible in the absence of a living interpretation of apostolic experience. Dupré conceives thus the Christ experience of the present generation, possible through the written and living Word, as almost similar to that experienced by the first witnesses of Christ event<sup>69</sup>. This is so because, the written Word entrusted to the Church today offers men the experience of the Revelation.

#### 4. 1. The Church and the Word of God

In a certain way, the Scripture enables us to be contemporaries of Jesus. Nevertheless, it remains a dead letter for those who are deprived of the interpretation. This is clear in the response of the Ethiopian eunuch to Philip: "How can [understand], unless someone guides me" (Acts 8, 26-40). The text that he reads becomes for him the Word of God only after the interpretation of the Apostle. Through the mediation of Philip, the believing community interpreted the Word of God.

<sup>67</sup> Avery Dulles comments on the positions of Schillebeeckx and Dupré. DULLES, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>68</sup> Translated from the French version: "Les expériences chrétiennes ont donc lieu dans et par des expériences de rencontre entre des hommes et des femmes, dans le cours de l'histoire et au sens de la nature où se déroule notre vie, mais toujours à la lumière du contenu de la foi de la tradition de l'expérience chrétienne. La foi authentique, vivante, advient donc « à l'audition », tout en ne trouvant son accomplissement que dans une expérience personnelle », Edward SCHILLEBEECKX, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>69</sup> Avery DULLES, *op. cit.* p. 82.

In the comprehension and interpretation of the Holy Scripture, the Church is guided by the same Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical authors. It is the Holy Spirit acting through the light of the living Tradition which enabled the Church to discern the inspired Holy Writing.<sup>70</sup> The shaping of the canon of Scriptures thus forms part of the recognition by the Church of the action of the Holy Spirit in the writing down of the Bible. Similarly, this shaping could be viewed as part of the task of biblical interpretation entrusted to the Church; the Church instructs the world where to find out the Word of God.

#### 4. 2. Canon of the scriptures: A Gift of the Church

The canonicity of the Bible is not merely a declaration of authority of the Scripture. It is to be viewed in the light of the divine origin of the Bible and that of the Church. Canonicity is primarily established in terms of Inspiration. One has to bear in mind that it is the work of the ecclesial community. It is a gift of the Church that man receives when he receives the canon of Scriptures. He receives it in and from the Church ; from the Church of yesterday - from the Church of the time of fixing the canon - as well as from the Church of today.<sup>71</sup>

The Old Testament community had recognized some of their books as Word of God and transmitted them with veneration. The New Testament community received them as a divine heritage and guards it as a treasure. It was due to the prophetic character of these writings that the new People of God could recognize the Incarnation as the accomplishment of God's plan<sup>72</sup>.

The development of the New Testament canon came about over a long process in the early centuries of the Church. In its formation, the Church is guided by some precise criteria: (1). Time criterion (antiquity), (2). Christological criterion (orthodoxy) or conformity to the apostolic testimony, (3). Ecclesial criterion or the regular liturgical use in the ancient Churches.

The closure of the canon is an act both of inclusion and exclusion: it means the inclusion of all inspired Scriptures and exclusion of the rest of the literature; a separation between the Word of God and the human writings, even of a spiritual nature. It is the act of recognizing the Scripture as the authentic trace of genuine apostolic kerygma and as the *norma normans* of faith. This forms part of the hermeneutic act of the Church. The Apocrypha and other ancient texts of

<sup>70</sup> PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, April 1993, Cf. Chapter III: "Characteristics of Catholic interpretation".

<sup>71</sup> Françoise MIES, « Où est la Parole de Dieu », *L'autorité de l'Écriture*, J.-M. POFFET (ed.), Cerf, Paris, 2002, p. 230-257.

<sup>72</sup> (128)

Christianity that promote theology and spirituality must be interpreted in the light of this corpus. As a result, the closure of the canon is not a limitation but an opening to biblical and theological hermeneutics.<sup>73</sup>

The status of the canonical corpus of the Bible is analogical to that of the sacramental body of Christ. And the place where the union Scripture - Word of God is fully realized and where the mediation of the Word by the Church is accomplished is the Sacred Liturgy. *Dei Verbum* declares:

The church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. 3. Liturgy and the Experience of the Word of God

The liturgy of the Word is offered as sacrament of the Word incarnate. Precisely, the recognition of the presence of Christ in the proclaimed Word of God confers on the liturgy of the Word a true sacramental dimension. Sacramental signs realize what they mean; the proclamation of the Word in the Liturgy realizes what it means. By this proclamation, a living link is established between the text and the apostolic kerygma and even with the voice of the Son of God.

It is the Holy Spirit who achieves this sacramental transition of the Scripture to the Word incarnate.

The Gospel acclamation "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ" signifies what the text is for the believer. This acclamation takes the form of the act of rendering glory to Christ the center of the world, and an act of thanksgiving which goes back to God, the author of the written Word. The Liturgy of the Word is from this point of view precisely the place of actualization of the Word, the place of encounter with the living God.

According Louis-Marie Chauvet, the sacramentality of the liturgy of the Word is administered by the mutual rapport between its four constituent elements: (1) readings of the canonically received texts; (2) the experience of the people of God evoked by these texts; (3) an assembly (ecclesia) which recognizes its unique identity; (4) an ordained minister who symbolically guarantees the apostolicity of what is read.<sup>75</sup> For this author, the correlation between these elements of the Liturgy of the Word is to be understood in the light of the relationship between four sacramental dimensions which constitute a biblical text: (a), oral and written tradition; (b), relation to the first Christian community; (c), canonical sanction; (d), hermeneutical process involved in the rewriting of the biblical texts. In this sense, the Liturgy of the Word is the sacramental "unveiling" of the constituent

<sup>73</sup> Françoise MIES, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> *Dei Verbum* n°13.

<sup>75</sup> Louis-Marie CHAUVET, *Symbole et sacrement*, *op. cit.* p. 216



elements of the Christian Scripture<sup>76</sup>. *Lectio divina*, personal mediation on the scripture, is in no way an alternative to the Liturgy of the Word, but an ecclesial act and an extension of the liturgy to the extent that it leads to the faithful reception of the proclaimed Word of God.

## Conclusion

To apprehend the originality of Christian Revelation, it is essential to begin from the anthropological notion of “word”. Man, mystery for himself and for others, expresses his inner self through words; God ineffable Mystery, also has chosen to reveal Himself and to give Himself to man by his own Word that is Himself. Thus, the Revelation is the light that arises from the divine Mystery projected on to the mystery of man<sup>77</sup>. Being both communication and sharing of Life, it is not only a message to be proclaimed but an experience to be lived. That is why it is offered through concrete historical events inviting man to enter into a covenantal relation with God. This invitation began with the act of creation, continued in the life of Israel and accomplished in the Word incarnated, crucified and risen. Apart from this historical event of Incarnation, the divine self-communication remains inconceivable to humanity

The Bible is not only the authentic testimony of the incarnated Word; it is part of divine Revelation, because it makes possible to all generations the experience of the mystery of Incarnation. As Jean Daniélou puts it, the purpose of the Bible “is not directly to tell us what God is, but what He has done”.<sup>78</sup> By communicating what God has done in history the Holy Scripture tells us what He is. The affirmation “All Scripture is inspired by God” means that the Scripture is not based only on human experience but on the Holy Spirit who actualizes the Revelation. In the contemplative reading of the Scripture, of which the Liturgy of the Word is the summit, the Holy Spirit resonates the incarnated Verb.

The Holy Scripture thus nourishes the faith of the ecclesial community but it is always the community that helps the Scripture to be acknowledged as the Word of God. Fixing of the Canon highlights this reality. In short, the actualization of Revelation remains associated with the universal mission of the mystical body of the Unique Mediator. The Gospel, testimony of the accomplishment of a universal promise, encloses in it an eschatological promise. If it is so, the Revelation is the dynamic process of salvation that has a universal reach. It certainly calls for a life of faith where the incarnated Word is the light for the path.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* p. 217.

<sup>77</sup> René LATOURELLE, *op. cit.*, p. 1174.

<sup>78</sup> Son objet « n'est pas directement de nous dire ce que Dieu est, mais ce que Dieu fait », Jean DANIELOU, *Mythes païens et mystère chrétiens*, Fayard, Paris, 1966, p. 76.

## Book Review

Dr. John Moolan

*Orders of Priesthood and Orders of Service*, by Lonappan Arangassery MST, Kottayam, Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India (OIRSI) Publishers 2008, ISBN 978-81-88456-31-4, p. xiv+208, Demy size Paperbacks, Price: Rs.200/-

The role of priest is found in every religion. The priesthood in the Church is derived from Christ, the high priest. The mission of Christ in the Church is continued in a special way by the priests and other ministers. Priesthood is indispensable for the celebration of the sacraments (mysteries). Dr. Lonappan Arangassery presents in his book the East Syrian tradition of priesthood and other ministries in a biblical, historical, liturgical, and theological perspective with special reference to the contemporary understanding and usage of them in the Syro-Malabar Church. The book with ten chapters and a glossary of numerous Syriac terms includes an exhaustive bibliography on the subject. A general conclusion and an elaborative index may be foreseen for the next impression.

Chapter one introduces certain Latin, Greek, and Syriac terms related to the Holy Orders clarifying their significance in the priestly and the other orders of service for a better understanding of the following chapters. Chapter two deals with the Old Testament background of the priesthood manifesting the gradual evolution of the role

of the priesthood from the natural (father of the family) to the representative (kings) and the Levitical (clan) priesthood. The laying on of hand and the anointing were the two important elements of the Old Testament priesthood. In this chapter the OT types of priesthood may be enhanced with more textual references and events. Chapter three explains the different ministries in the New Testament and the early Church. Jesus became the high priest through His self-emptying sacrifice on the Cross. Therefore the NT priesthood derived from Christ demands the ordained ministers a self negation for the salvation of all. The apostles and their followers applied themselves to the unique priesthood of Christ and to the collective priesthood of the people of God, the Church. The ecclesial dimensions of ministries in the NT and their diversity in the apostolic Church manifest that the ministries are the constituent part in the building up of the Church.

Chapters 4-7 deal with the historical development of the East Syrian holy orders. Fourth chapter speaks about the apostolic succession of priesthood in the early East Syrian tradition up to the fourth century. In this regard the evidence from Syriac Didascalia, Aphrahat, and Ephrem are brought forward to show the existence of the variety of ministers and their functions in the Church during this period. Fifth chapter discusses the



fifth century East Syrian development of priesthood and others ministries during the time of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Narsai demonstrating the sacramentality of the priestly ministries together with the theological and symbolical significance of liturgical rites in this respect. Sixth chapter deals with 6-13 century pre-scholastic East Syrian liturgical commentators for the symbolic and sacramental functioning of different ministerial actions of the lower (readers, sub-deacons, deacons), middle (presbyters, periodeutes/visitors, chor-bishops), and superior (bishops, metropolitans, catholicos/patriarchs) orders with their NT significance during the public worship in space and time. Seventh chapter concentrates on the 13-14 century commentaries of Abdisho and Timothy II as the final phase of the development of the priesthood and others ministries in the background of the Western scholastic influence. Both of them give priesthood as the first among the seven sacraments, as the basic mystery required for the celebration of other mysteries (sacraments). Since the unction of the Holy Spirit is given through the laying on of hand and the signing of the Cross on the candidate, there is no anointing with the oil in the administration of priesthood. The anointing with oil given in option in the restored Syro-Malabar pontifical of 2007 is a Latin innovation.

Chapters 8-9 are on the liturgico-theological development of the laying on of hand in the holy Orders. Chapter eight explicates the liturgy of the laying on of hand in the orders of services like readers (*qaroye*), sub-deacons (*beupdyaqne*), deaconesses

(*msamsanite*), and deacons (*msamsane*) through a comparative study of various manuscripts with that of revised pontifical texts of 1957 and 2007 in the Syro-Malabar Church. The prayer of the laying on of hand in the orders of reader and sub-deacon is not meant for the descending of the Holy Spirit, but a blessing only to confer the appropriate functions in the service of the Church through the concerned orders. There is no laying on of hand in the ordination of deaconesses, but the prayer is meant to strengthen their service in fulfilling the will of God at the baptismal unction of the whole body of the women candidates with oil and to pray in the heart on the head of the monk during the liturgy. This order is left out in the Syro-Malabar pontifical. The prayer of the laying on of hand in the order of deacons is sacramental for the descending of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them for the concerned functions in the Church.

Chapter nine exposes the significance of the laying on of hand in the orders of priesthood conferred on presbyters (*qashishe*), cor-bishops (*corapisqope*), archdeacons (*arkedyaqone*), bishops (*apisqope*), and metropolitans (*mitropolit*). The first three groups are endowed with restricted ministries in the Church, while the last two groups exercise fully the priestly ministries in the Church. The present Syro-Malabar pontifical does not include the ordinations of archdeacons and the cor-bishops. The sacramentality of the orders of the priesthood consists in the laying on of hand, signing with the Cross, and the investiture to the status. In the orders of archdeacons, cor-bishops, metropolitans, and patriarchs or catholicos



there is no laying on of hand, but God's help is invoked praying to strengthen them in fulfilling their duties worthily. The sacramentality of ritual actions, postures, gestures, and liturgical vestments manifest the dignity and the greatness of the holy orders. Various ecclesiastical orders with different ranks and status in their functioning are paralleled with the heavenly ministries of nine choirs of angels to elucidate the beauty and the depth of the symbolical meaning of different orders. Observations on the present restored Syro-Malabar pontifical of 2007 indicate the restoration as a great relief from the usage of various private texts in this regard by the hierarchs until then, and make mention of certain structural defects and unnecessary elements found in the text.

Chapter ten presents the problems and challenges of the priesthood on the basis of numerous ecclesiastical documents including those of Vatican II on the subject. Post Vatican II theological trends on the models of ministry today as the collective responsibility and the equality in the Church do not exclude the existence of varieties of services and charisms in the Church. The East Syrian perspective of

orders of priesthood and the other ministries is very rich in sacramental symbolism for representing the heavenly Church in the earthly Church. The Church depends on her chosen ministers to dispense sacred mysteries for the economy of salvation (*mdabbranuta*). Patriarchs, bishops, and priests are the faithful stewards and custodians of the sacred mysteries. Themes like regulations on the appointment of bishops, the need of reinstating the archdiaconate in Syro-Malabar Church, ordinary and extra ordinary ministries in the West and the East, observations on the role of the sub-deacon, provision for new ministries and the need of re-instating the ancient permanent orders like readers, singers, deaconesses, and deacons are opened for discussion.

This study is a significant contribution to the knowledge of the Chaldean, Assyrian, and Malabar liturgical traditions on the holy Orders. Such a study containing first time a comprehensive view of the entire holy orders and their ministries in the East Syrian tradition will be of great help for the clergy and the faithful interested in liturgy.

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## **Indian Government Releases St. Alphonsa Commemorative Coins**

The Indian government on 23rd August released commemorative coins to mark the birth centenary of St. Alphonsa. The birth centenary celebrations began on 19th August at Bharananganam and will culminate on 19th August 2010. St. Alphonsa was born at Kudamaloor near Kottayam in Kerala on 19th August 1910 and she became a nun in the Franciscan Clarist Congregation at the age of 18. Releasing the birth centenary coins, the Finance Minister of India, Mr. Pranab Mukharjee, extolled the life witness of St. Alphonsa saying, "She taught us to transcend the barriers of language, culture and geography to live together. She embodies the noble spirit and her life symbolises spirituality". The Indian government has also released postal stamps in memory of St. Alphonsa both in 1986 and 2008.

## **11th Inter-Christian Symposium in Rome**

The 11th Inter-Christian Symposium was held in Rome from 3-5, August 2009 and discussed the topic "St. Augustine in the Western and Eastern Traditions". Pope Benedict XVI sent his warm greetings to the organizers and the participants of the symposium saying, "The Saint of Hippo, A

Great Father of the Latin Church, is, in fact, of fundamental importance for theology and for the West's very culture, whereas the reception of his thought in Orthodox theology has revealed itself to be rather problematic. Hence, to know with historical objectivity and fraternal cordiality the doctrinal and spiritual riches that make up the patrimony of the Christian East and West, is indispensable not only to appreciate them, but to promote better reciprocal appreciation among all Christians".

## **XVII Syro-Malabar Synod Concludes**

The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church was convened from 17-28, August 2009. The discussions of the prelates on different ecclesial as well as secular matters registered the deep concern and anxiety of the shepherds for the people of God. The Fathers dedicated a reasonable amount of time on the study and approval of Liturgical Texts for various occasions. The decision of the Synod to convene meetings of the representatives of priests from all the eparchies in Kerala in two or three batches in the year for priests and to erect a Library building, Vocation Promotion Centre, and a Pastoral Centre are laudable. The Synod has given consent to publish the Particular Laws in a book form in the near future. The Synod of Bishops will meet again from 11-15, January 2010.

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